

# Exploring Teaching Excellence

## *A Case Study of the 'Competition for Teaching Excellence' in Germany*

Lisa Bockerhoff



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# Abstract

The issue of teaching excellence has become an important topic for higher education policies around the world. Due to massification and the importance of education for national competitiveness in the knowledge society, excellence has become the subject of the political debate. Nowadays, teaching excellence initiatives promoting teaching excellence can be found at various levels in higher education. They concern individuals, departments and whole institutions. As diverse as the initiatives are, as diverse are the possible strategies for universities to increase teaching quality. However, teaching excellence lacks a clear definition and understandings of excellence in teaching are diverse. Furthermore, in the academic literature it is criticized that a critical approach is lacking in the debate about teaching excellence and that in the discussion about teaching excellence possible implications are mostly ignored.

In this study the perception of teaching excellence in the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ in Germany was examined. The study was constructed as a qualitative case study. To answer the research question, documents related to the competition was examined.

The focus was set on the strategies that were recommended and proposed in the competition to increase the quality of teaching. In the analytical framework the strategies were divided into two groups; first, strategies which concern structural change and second those concern a cultural change.

The results of the study indicated that the perception of teaching excellence in the competition was expressed through an organizational approach in which the responsibility of the institution was seen as important and where cultural and structural change went hand in hand. In this perception teaching excellence was not only in responsibility of an individual teacher, rather the organization and the central leadership was in focus. Whereas the combination of structural and cultural approach was seen as mandatory; besides convergence in the overall perception of teaching excellence in the competition, a wide range of path in this joint approach is manifested, which allows institutional differentiation.





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*Finally I just want to end with my favorite quotation by Burton Clark (who actually just cited someone else but that doesn't matter)*

*“(... ) universities are naturally disintegrative organizations held together by ‘love’ (....)”*

*Thanks, Tack and Danke*

*Lisa Brockerhoff*



# Abbreviations

<b>RWTHA</b>	Technical University of Aachen ( <i>Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen</i> )
<b>UB</b>	Bielefeld University ( <i>Universität Bielefeld</i> )
<b>BMBF</b>	Federal Ministry for Education and Research ( <i>Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung</i> )
<b>UBr</b>	University Bremen ( <i>Universität Bremen</i> )
<b>CAQDAS</b>	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
<b>CETL</b>	Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
<b>VA</b>	Combined Application ( <i>Verbundsantrag</i> )
<b>TUD</b>	Technical University Darmstadt ( <i>Technische Universität Darmstadt</i> )
<b>ALUF</b>	University of Freiburg ( <i>Albert-Ludwigs Universität Freiburg</i> )
<b>GAUG</b>	University Göttingen ( <i>Georg-August-Universität Göttingen</i> )
<b>UHE</b>	University Medical Centre Hamburg-Eppendorf ( <i>Universitätsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf</i> )
<b>HEFCE</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for England
<b>TUK</b>	Technical University of Kaiserslautern ( <i>Technische Universität Kaiserslautern</i> )
<b>UK</b>	University of Kassel ( <i>Universität Kassel</i> )
<b>KMK</b>	Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany ( <i>Kultusministerkonferenz</i> )
<b>TUM</b>	Technical University Munich ( <i>Technische Universität München</i> )
<b>NPM</b>	New Public Management
<b>NTFS</b>	National Teaching Fellowship Scheme
<b>WR</b>	German Council of Science and Humanities ( <i>Wissenschaftsrat</i> )
<b>UP</b>	University of Potsdam ( <i>Universität Potsdam</i> )
<b>UPa</b>	University of Paderborn
<b>Stifterverband</b>	Business Community's Innovation Agency for the German Science System ( <i>Stifterverband der deutschen Wissenschaft</i> )



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# 1 Introduction

This study will examine how teaching excellence is perceived in the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ (*Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre*) in Germany. This will be accomplished through analyzing the applications from the award-winning universities and other documents related to the competition.

Nowadays, excellence plays a significant role in the discussions about research and teaching in higher education around the world. With the emergence of the knowledge society and global competition, the debate about teaching excellence has become increasingly politicized (Teichler, 2003). Consequently, a change of the meaning of the term can be discerned. Whereas, traditionally, excellence was mainly discussed internally by academics, nowadays excellence is a part of the evaluative state and increasingly connected to performance assessment of higher education institutions (Clegg, 2007; Lanzendorf & Verburch, 2003). Even though the importance of excellence in institutional strategies and policies has increased, Skelton (2005, 2007a) criticized the lack of research and the unquestioned use of the concept. Whereas in the public debate it is assumed that excellence as a concept will have a positive effect, the discussion in the academic literature is sometimes skeptical. According to Skelton (2007a) the focus on excellence can dominate the system leading to the neglect of other problems in higher education.

Nevertheless, excellence in teaching has become an important element of higher education policies and institutional strategies (Teichler, 2003). The first initiative to promote teaching excellence was established in 1957 at the University of California, USA (Skelton, 2007c). Meanwhile, initiatives promoting teaching excellence have been institutionalized globally and are connected to all levels in higher education (Skelton, 2007c). Studies have shown that conceptions and purpose of teaching excellence in these initiatives are diverse (D'Andrea, 2007; Gibbs, 2008). Furthermore, teaching excellence can reside at all levels in higher education and will find different expressions at various levels (Elton, 1998; Little, Locke, Parker, & Richardson, 2007).

Teaching excellence in this study is understood as an approach to increase the quality of teaching at higher education institutions. Furthermore, a distinction will be made between strategies focusing on a structural approach, based on change in conditions and institutional

structures, and a cultural approach, which focuses on activities to establish a culture of teaching at the institution (Becker, Wild, Stegmüller, & Tadsen, 2012; Frost & Teodorescu, 2001). It will be examined through which strategies the universities try to achieve teaching excellence.

The ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ was organized by the ‘Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany’ (*Kultusministerkonferenz (short: KMK)*), and the ‘Business Community’s Innovation Agency for the German Science System’ (*Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft (short: Stifterverband)*). Universities and universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*) could take part in the competition. However, to ensure a more valid basis of comparison, this study focuses only on universities and excludes the applications from universities of applied sciences.

## 1.1 Research Question

The overall research question of this study is:

How is excellence teaching perceived in the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’?

To answer the question, two sub-questions are formulated to structure the process of analysis. The first question (A) refers to the pre-application process of the competition. Here, the documents such as the announcement of the competition and recommendations for the applications will be in focus. The second question (B) is related to the actual applications from the institutions. Here, the applications from the award-winning universities will be examined.

A. How is teaching excellence framed in the competition?

B. How is teaching excellence operationalized in the applications?

a. Through which strategies do universities want to achieve teaching excellence?

b. How similar are the applications of the different universities?

## 1.2 Significance

The public debate of excellence has increased in recent years since teaching is seen as important for economic success (Skelton, 2005). Institutions as well as national policies focus on excellence in research and teaching and different national initiatives for teaching excellence have emerged. They all have different conceptions of excellence and different purposes (D'Andrea, 2007; Gibbs, 2008).

In the academic literature the emergence of the excellence debate is not just positively discussed. Skelton (2005) emphasizes the importance of understanding teaching excellence because of the implications it can have for the system. Up until now, little research has been undertaken in this field (Skelton, 2005). Available research focuses on initiatives in England and on individual teaching excellence. This study will contribute to the knowledge base and shed light on institutional teaching excellence and on German approaches.

The German system is interesting because institutional differentiation is new to the system. While historically, the system was characterized by strong equality between institutions, in the past few years institutional stratification has emerged (Kehm, 2013). This started in the field of research, e.g. with the 'Excellence Initiative' (*Exzellenzinitiative*), and in changes in funding systems. The 'Competition for Teaching Excellence' may contribute to this new development.

Additionally, since the 'Competition for Teaching Excellence' is the biggest investment into teaching in higher education in Germany, the potential influence on the system and future investments and innovations in the field of teaching in Germany can be enormous. One aim of the initiative is to bring teaching back on the agenda in higher education and to strengthen the status compared to research (Kultusministerkonferenz [KMK], 2008). Since the initiative should not only influence the honored institutions, but rather the whole system, defining the concept is of importance for the whole system.

## 1.3 Thesis Outline

In the following chapter, *'Teaching Excellence – From Contextualization to an Analytical Framework'* a literature review related to teaching excellence and information about the German higher education system will be presented. First, the emergence of the concept of

excellence in higher education will be presented. Furthermore, variations within teaching excellence initiatives and common features will be described including a short description of three different initiatives in Europe. Subsequently, the German higher education system and the emergence of the excellence debate will be presented including a detailed description of the 'Competition for Teaching Excellence'. In the third part, the concept of teaching excellence will be structured. In the last part of this chapter, the analytical framework for this study will be established.

In the third chapter, the methodology used in this study will be outlined. Here, a description of the research design, as well as arguments for the selection of the case and a description of the documents used for analysis will be provided. Furthermore, questions concerning validity and reliability will be addressed. At the end the analytical process will be described.

In the fourth chapter institutional characteristics, location, size, age, type and success in the excellence initiative for research of the selected universities will be presented. Furthermore, these institutional features will be compared to those of the institutions which were selected for the final round of the competition, but did not succeed there.

In the fifth chapter, the results of the analysis will be presented. This part can be divided into two sections. In the first part the results of the analysis of the documents related to the pre-application phase will be presented. In the second part, the findings of the analysis of the applications will be outlined.

In chapter six, the results of the analysis will be discussed. The discussion is structured according to the research questions. In the last chapter, the findings will be summarized and ideas for further research will be presented.

# 2 Teaching Excellence – From Contextualization to an Analytical Framework

## 2.1 The Development of Excellence in Higher Education

According to Barnett (1992) and Skelton (2005) the understanding of excellence has to be understood in the broader perspective of the purpose of higher education at a specific time. *“The degree to which particular understandings of ‘teaching excellence’ are dominant in a particular time and place reveals something about the relative status of these broader visions about the nature and purpose of higher education.”* (Skelton, 2004, p. 452)

Skelton (2005, p. 24) identified four understandings of teaching excellence, the *traditional*, *performative*, *psychologized* and the *critical* understandings of teaching excellence.

The *traditional* understanding of excellence is based on disciplinary knowledge and has the purpose to build up a social elite. The lecture is seen as the appropriate method of teaching, whereby the teacher is judged by his or her disciplinary knowledge. The traditional view is linked to the early stages of universities. In terms of a traditional understanding of teaching excellence the purpose of universities is cultural reproduction (Skelton, 2005).

The *performative* understanding is based on rules and regulations and emphasizes the efficiency and the effectiveness of the system. Skelton (2005) mentioned three characteristics which are connected to this view of excellence. First, teaching in this view has the ability to contribute to national economic performance. With that employability and work-based learning are emphasized. Second, with teaching excellence a university can compete for students on a market and third, teaching excellence can be measured and rewarded. In this view teaching excellence is located in rules and regulations, and the main purpose of it is to increase the system’s efficiency (Skelton, 2005).

The *psychologized* view is based on the relationship between students and teachers. Here the learning process is seen as different from the teaching process. *“Teaching excellence is*

*associated with the establishment of universal procedures for teaching and learning, their successful implementation in practice and the achievement of specified outcomes”* (Skelton, 2005, p. 31). Individual learning achievements are in focus and the role of the teacher is to recognize the individual needs of students and according to this he or she should choose the appropriate method for teaching in order to develop a deep approach to learning. A student-centered approach is associated with this view of excellence (Skelton, 2005).

In the *critical* view teaching excellence is understood as a contribution to emancipation and change. It emphasizes the inclusion of marginal groups as well as a reflective dialogue between students and teachers (Skelton, 2005).

*Teaching excellence from the critical perspective focuses on the broader purposes of higher education and the underlying educational values that inform teachers’ work. According to this view, teaching cannot simply be reduced to technical or practical matters; it inevitably involves moral questions about what it means to be educated.* (Skelton, 2005, p. 34)

According to Skelton (2007b), the most prominent understanding of excellence today is based on a *performative* and *psychologized* understanding. Nevertheless, this understanding of excellence is not deeply rooted in higher education. A shift in the understanding of excellence in higher education has been visible in the past few years.

For a long time, excellence in higher education was concerned internally by academics which were seen as responsible for controlling excellence in research and in teaching (Lanzendorf & Verburgh, 2003). Criteria for measuring excellence were mainly based on disciplinary discourses and on academic standards (Lanzendorf & Verburgh, 2003). Furthermore, excellence had a strong elitist notion and was used to gain prestige.

Nowadays, excellence of higher education is of public concern and a main aim of higher education policies and of institutional strategies (Skelton, 2007b; Teichler, 2003). Furthermore, excellence is increasingly measured by objective criteria and often linked to the allocation of funding (Lanzendorf & Verburgh, 2003; Teichler, 2003).

Reasons for this change in the understanding of excellence are diverse and connected to overall changes in the use of excellence outside and within higher education.

Like other concepts, the new understanding of excellence migrates from business into higher education (Clegg, 2007). In industry, quality and excellence models emerged with the

beginning of mass production away from direct quality control by the professional towards quality and excellence models (Clegg, 2007). This also happened in higher education, quality and excellence moved away from professional judgment towards external control according to objective standards (Lanzendorf & Verburch, 2003). Additionally, the competitive background of excellence and the concept of the customer as a key component come from excellence models in industry and have migrated into higher education (Clegg, 2007).

The process of massification and rising costs are important factors for changes in higher education and for changes in the meaning of excellence. The introduction of market tools was seen as a solution to increase the quality of teaching and research and to solve problems of effectiveness and efficiency (Dill, 2007). One feature of marketization is linked to an overall change in public administration known under the term 'New Public Management' (short: NPM) (Agasisti & Catalano, 2006). NPM is characterized by focusing on efficiency and effectiveness, decentralized management and a competitive environment (Meek, 2003). Due to this, universities are seen as instruments rather than institutions and are managed with an economic logic (Gumport, 2000; Olsen & Maassen, 2007).

Within higher education, *"excellence (...) belongs to an organisation change approach to higher education institutions which has its origins elsewhere in discourses of organisational change and management"* (Clegg, 2007, p. 93). The actual use of excellence is now part of the so-called evaluative state, and mainly serves public purposes and not the primary function of higher education (Clegg, 2007). The politicization of the discussion of excellence in higher education has implications, which are ambiguously discussed in the literature.

Teichler (2003) mentioned that on the one hand teaching excellence is seen as an impulse for competition which leads to an increase in quality, but also as a destructive element, which is not connected to the purpose of higher education. According to Skelton (2007b) the actual use of teaching excellence serves to combine many contradictory goals of today's higher education system. *"It offers a way in which the seemingly contradictory goals of expansion, efficiency, choice, the maintenance of standards, economic relevance and meeting individual needs through specialization can all be brought together under a common banner."* (Skelton, 2007b, p. 1)

Additionally, it shifts responsibility away from the government to the individual or institutional level (Skelton, 2007b). With this powerful habit, excellence in higher education

enters the everyday language (Skelton, 2007b). Skelton (2007b) criticizes the unquestioned use of excellence and the unclear definition of the term. According to Skelton (2007a), the performative impact which excellence has on national and international competition is more important for governments than the meaning of the concept. Furthermore, he argues that some assumptions of teaching excellence are taken for granted which should be questioned (Skelton, 2007a, 2007b). One of these assumptions is the positive perception of the concept. According to Clegg (2007) teaching excellence should not automatically be seen to increase the quality of teaching. He argues that competition concerning teaching excellence may lead to greater inequalities in the system. Additionally, the performative understanding and the link between teaching excellence and economic success are seen as a problem, since this ignores other problems of higher education e.g. insufficient funding (Skelton, 2007a).

Nevertheless, in the public debate excellence is seen as an advancement and necessity for competition. This causes an expansion of excellence policies in higher education in teaching and research and the emergence of many teaching excellence schemes. According to Rostan and Vaira (2011), these policies have an enormous impact on the system. *“Policies for excellence are not limited to identifying institutions (...) as the top ones in each system, they also reshape systems’ structure and their operational logic, by giving special and selective funds to institutions (...) that are considered as excellent.”* (Rostan & Vaira, 2011, p. 65)

Whereas, the excellence debate was first connected to research, the link between excellence and teaching and learning is now considered to be important as well. The reasons for this are diverse. According to Henard and Leprince-Ringuet (2008) the importance of quality teaching is linked to various changes in higher education.

*Quality teaching has become an issue of importance as the landscape of higher education has been facing continuous changes: increased international competition, increasing social and geographical diversity of the student body, increasing demands of value for money, introduction of information technologies etc.* (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008, p. 2)

Additionally, the importance of education for economic success and the need to raise the status of teaching next to research are reasons for the link between excellence and teaching (Skelton, 2005). Since the status of teaching is often lower than the status of research, motivations to invest in teaching from an organizational and individual perspective are secondary (Becker, 2012). According to Harrison (2002) policies and structures have to be established in order to change this situation at universities. Elton (1998) argues that if



teaching quality should be preserved or increased, teaching excellence has to be rewarded in order to motivate institutions and individuals. Over the last years, many national initiatives for teaching excellence have emerged. These initiatives have diverse conceptions and purposes (D'Andrea, 2007; Gibbs, 2008).

In the following subsection, differences and commonalities of teaching excellence initiatives will be described. Furthermore, three different national programs in Europe will briefly be presented to illustrate the diversity of these initiatives.

### **2.1.1 Initiatives for Teaching and Learning**

As mentioned earlier, many different initiatives promoting teaching excellence have emerged on different levels in higher education. These initiatives have different conceptions of teaching excellence and are not uniform in their purposes and structures.

*Quality teaching initiatives are very diverse in nature and in function. Some of these initiatives are undertaken at the teachers' level, others at departmental, institutional or country level. Some quality initiatives aim to improve pedagogical methods while others address the global environment of student learning. Some are top-down process, other induce grass-root changes. (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008, p. 4)*

According to D'Andrea (2007), purposes of teaching excellence initiatives are either explicitly or implicitly expressed in descriptions of the programs and very diverse. Some initiatives have the purpose of raising the status of teaching or of celebrating and recognizing individual excellence, promoting good practices or increasing the awareness of teaching excellence on an institutional level. Other initiatives adopt a wider perspective and have the aim of influencing the whole system or of developing professional teaching perceptions.

In a study about different excellence schemes, Gibbs (2008) identified twelve different conceptions of teaching excellence, some of which have subcategories, which are summarized in the following table:

Different conceptions of teaching excellence initiatives			
1	No conception		
2	Exhibiting certain teaching behaviors in a skillful way		
3	Implementing a student focus effectively		
4	Engaging in the 'scholarship of teaching'	4a	Undertaking reflection
		4b	Having a personal philosophy of teaching
		4c	Making use of pedagogic literature
		4d	Undertaking pedagogic research
5	The research-teaching nexus	5a	Research benefits teaching directly
		5b	Undertaking 'research-based' teaching
		5c	Undertaking the 'scholarship of integration'
		5d	Displaying 'pedagogical subject knowledge'
6	Developing students	6a	Nurturing the development of individuals
		6b	Inducting students into the (disciplinary or professional) community
7	Creating effective learning environments	7a	Creating effective courses and programs
		7b	Collaborating in teaching teams
8	Good citizenship		
9	Innovation in teaching, learning and assessment		
10	Developing the teaching of others		
11	Corporate definitions of excellence		
12	Leadership of teaching		
13	Collegial definitions of excellence	13a	From within the local culture
		13b	From the external community

Table 1: Different concepts of teaching excellence initiatives according to Gibbs (2008, pp. 4-19)

According to Gibbs (2008), all examined initiatives have a unique conception of teaching excellence, whereby most schemes combine several of the above stated conceptions. Nevertheless, some patterns could be identified. The schemes focus on student learning and

support rather than on formal teaching settings. Rather than a micro-focus on teaching, a focus was set on a wider perspective of teaching, like the development of a teaching environment. And the schemes have a focus on the teacher.

*(...) traditional emphasis on the teacher themselves, and student feedback ratings of the teacher, on the teacher's research record and subject knowledge, and on external recognition of the teacher, with little focus on students, on learning, on the learning environment or on the process of developing teaching (Gibbs, 2008, p. 19)*

Furthermore, some of the schemes focus on the development of teaching through e.g. leadership of teaching. Other schemes have a clear emphasis on the conception of 'scholarship of teaching' as the main understanding of teaching excellence (Gibbs, 2008). This shows how diverse the conceptions and purposes of teaching excellence in various schemes are.

Besides some differences, common features and patterns can be recognized. Most excellence programs focus on individual excellence and mostly reward past performance rather than future performance (D'Andrea, 2007). In addition, excellence in teaching is more often used than excellence in learning (Little et al., 2007). Furthermore, excellence teaching initiatives mostly have a narrow conception of what counts as teaching. A study by Macfarlane (2007) has shown that many schemes focus on the performance phase of teaching and ignore other stages like curriculum design, preparation or evaluation.

To show the diversity of teaching excellence initiatives on the national level, the 'National Teaching Fellowship Scheme' (short: NTFS) and the 'Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning' (short: CETL), both initiatives from England, and the program 'Centres for excellence teaching' from Finland will briefly be described. All three initiatives have a different focus from the German competition. The description will help to understand the differences of excellence conceptions between the different initiatives.

In England, the NTFS has the purpose of recognizing and rewarding excellent teachers in higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The scheme was announced by the 'Higher Education Funding Council for England' (short: HEFCE) in 2000, and in the first round 20 excellent teachers were rewarded with 50.000 pounds each (Skelton, 2007c). At the beginning this scheme had a unique perception of teaching excellence, it combined past performance and future development activities (Skelton, 2007c). Nevertheless, this changed in 2006. In the reform process the project strands for developing innovation were separated from the

performance prize, making the NTFS a more usual scheme than before (Skelton, 2007c). The NTFS has a clear focus on the individual teacher. However, the separation of past performance and innovation may limit the effect of the initiative (Skelton, 2007c).

Another national initiative from England is the CETL that started in 2005. This program has the purpose of increasing the status for teaching and learning and recognizes excellent teaching and motivates institutions and departments to invest in teaching and learning (Little & Locke, 2011). The HEFCE provides 315 million pounds over the course of 5 years. In this program, 74 CETLs emerged in a variety of disciplines (Little & Locke, 2011). Excellence was not clearly defined by the initiators, the program rather focuses on a variety of understandings and leaves much possibility for definition to the disciplines (Little & Locke, 2011). The approach of this initiative, compared to the NTFS, has a more disciplinary perspective. Not the excellence of individual teachers is in focus, but the teaching on the departmental level. The CETLs therefore have a wider perspective on teaching. The established Centres focus on different tasks like:

*(...) development of new curriculum content; diagnostic and evaluative tools and toolkits; support materials for staff; new e-Learning and communication systems designed to exploit the potential of Web 2.0; piloting of new approaches to teaching and learning (...); research projects and peer-reviewed publications; events, including internal development activities and wider dissemination seminars and conferences. (Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE], 2011, p. iii)*

The Centres are mostly support units for teaching and learning and connected to specific disciplines (HEFCE, 2011).

In comparison, the initiative ‘Centres of Excellence’ from Finland adopts a different approach to teaching excellence. The initiative has existed since 1998, and is organized by the Ministry of Education and the ‘Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council’. Since 1998, five rounds of the programs have taken place. The purpose is to improve and raise the status of teaching and promote development in the area of teaching. The initiative emerged as a counterpart to the ‘Centres of Excellence in Research’ in Finland (Hiltunen, 2009). In comparison to the CETL, ‘Centres of Excellence’ in Finland are not support units, but teaching units at universities. Criteria for evaluation are “[the] mission of the unit, programme and course design, delivery of education, outputs and continual development.” (Hiltunen, 2009, p. 10) The Finnish initiative, in contrast to the NTFS focuses on education on the departmental level.

## **2.2 Teaching Excellence in the Context of Higher Education Policy in Germany**

As already mentioned, the understanding of excellence is linked to broader perspectives on higher education. For that reason, this chapter will describe the higher education policy debate in Germany in the last years as well as major changes. Overall changes in government and funding systems can be seen as prerequisites of the emergence of the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’. Apart from a strong need for additional funding, the awareness of decreasing quality in teaching and the low status of teaching beside research can be seen as a direct influence to the emergence of the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ in Germany. In this section, first a short description of the German higher education system and major changes during the past few years will be presented. Then the development of the excellence debate in research, which is linked to the emergence of the ‘Excellence Initiative’, will be described. Subsequently, the emergence of the excellence debate in the area of teaching will be presented. Furthermore, a description of the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ will be provided. At the end, a short overview about activities after 2009 will be provided.

### **2.2.1 Higher Education in Germany**

A specific feature of the German higher education system should be mentioned first. Higher education in Germany is not in the responsibility of the federal level but of the Länder. Consequently different higher education systems exist in Germany. Coordination between the Länder is ensured by the KMK. Similarly, the funding of institutions is a responsibility of the Länder. According to §91b of the German constitution (Deutscher Bundestag, 2010) the federal state is only allowed to finance specific projects in higher education institutions if they have supra-regional significance.

Nevertheless, general trends of changes can be recognized in all Länder. The changes are diverse and affect all areas of higher education. According to Teichler (2009b cited by Kehm, 2013, p. 83), German universities have undergone eight changes in the past 20 years.

First, there has been a deregulation of state control which leads to more autonomy for the institutions, and second a change in funding, from line item to lump sum budgeting and an increase of performance-related funding. Third, a rise in power of the central administration of higher education institutions has occurred, and fourth there has been growing pressure on

the internationalization and labor market orientation of study programs. Fifth, an increase in research investment and more emphasis on the link between economic growth and technology can be made out. Furthermore, an introduction of new evaluation mechanisms like accreditation can be identified. Additionally, increased the monitoring of academic activities and performance-related payments for professors have been introduced. And finally, more vertical stratification of the higher education with an increase in competition between institutions is visible.

Additionally, changes in the area of teaching have also been implemented through the Bologna Reform. The old two-cycle system (Magister/ Diplom - PhD) was transformed into a three-cycle system (Bachelor - Master - PhD) and an emphasis on learning outcomes was introduced. Furthermore, the introduction of accreditation as quality assurance was introduced. Subsequently, the control of quality was moved out of internal discussions and away from direct government control. Also, employability and internationalization were emphasized through the Bologna Reform.

Besides the changes in governance structures, with more autonomy for higher education institutions and less direct state control, the introduction of NPM and more competition between the institutions, funding systems of universities changed. More competitive funding has been introduced. Furthermore, instead of historical measurements, formula- or contract-based funding mechanisms increased (Babyesiza, 2010; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009). However, a distinction between teaching and research funding has to be made, because the competitive funding for teaching is much lower than in the area of research. In 2005 about 46% of the research budget was allocated through competition whereas for teaching it was just about 1% (Stifterverband, 2008a). However, private funding and cost sharing mechanisms are still low in Germany compared to other countries.

## **2.2.2 Excellence in Research**

The excellence debate in Germany is strongly linked to the emergence of the ‘excellence initiative’, a program of the federal and the Länder to create top-level research institutions in Germany. Traditionally the German higher education system was characterized through a low horizontal differentiation between the institutions (Kehm, 2013). Apart from the vertical differentiation between universities and universities of applied science the system was marked

by strong homogeneity and the quality of the institution was more or less on the same level (Kehm, 2013).

Reasons for the emergence of the initiative are diverse and are linked to the already described changes in higher education and the emergence of the knowledge society. In the knowledge society, research and education are seen as main drivers for economic success and are therefore central to national policies (Maassen & Stensaker, 2011). Additionally, the increasing consideration of university rankings has led to the emergence of the excellence debate in research (Berthold, Gösta, & Ziegel, 2007). Additionally, universities in Germany are seen as underfunded, and in comparison to other countries Germany only spends 1.2% of the GDP on higher education, which is less than the OECD average of 1.5%. Moreover, the funding has decreased in relation to student numbers in the last years (OECD, 2012; Stifterverband, 2008a).

Since the Länder do not have enough resources to invest additional money in higher education and the federal level has the resources, but not the right to invest directly in higher education, the solution was to create a special program.

In 2004, the idea of an excellence initiative for research was articulated by the then Federal Minister of Education and Research to identify '*lighthouses*' in the German higher education system to stay competitive on a global level (Kehm, 2013).

According to the former Federal Minister of Education and Research Bulmahn (2007 cited by Kehm, 2013) the official reasons for the initiatives were as follows: more cutting edge research was needed for Germany to stay competitive, and additional funding for interdisciplinary research was needed. Moreover, the demographic change stresses the need to focus on talent mobilization. As mentioned above, internationalization and global competitiveness are also included as needs as well as the demand for highly-qualified research staff within and outside of universities and the desire to achieve top rankings for German universities. It can be seen that the reasons for the initiative were mostly connected to aspects of competitiveness.

The negotiations between the federal level and the Länder were not easy. Besides the need for money, the Länder did not want to relinquish power to the federal level. Nevertheless, in 2005 the Federal Minister of Education and Research together with the Länder ministries

announced the ‘Excellence Initiative’ (Kehm, 2013). The initiative consists of three lines for which universities can apply, the first for founding graduate schools for doctoral training, the second for creating excellence clusters for interdisciplinary and high level research and the third for institutional concepts with the prospective to become a top level university (Deutsche Forschungs Gesellschaft [DFG], 2011). The initiative was planned for five years and the federal government invested about 250 million euros and the Länder approximately 130 million Euros annually for the three funding streams (Kehm, 2013). At the moment, the third round of the initiative is commencing. Between 2006 and 2017 about 4.6 billion Euros will be invested by the federal government and by the Länder (DFG, 2011; Kehm, 2013). Besides the additional funding which was provided for some institutions a steeper stratification was introduced.

### **2.2.3 Excellence in Teaching**

Due to the ‘Excellence Initiative’, much money was invested in research. At the same time a need for additional funding related to teaching became obvious, and the debate about the decreasing quality of education gained momentum. Also, the emergence of student protests stress the need for change (Becker, 2012).

Problems of the German higher education system in teaching are the rather high teacher-student ratio, the long study duration of students and the low status of teaching in comparison to research (Wissenschaftsrat [WR], 2008).

The Bologna Process is one attempt to reform the education system in Germany and make it more competitive in the future (Kehm, 2013). The introduction of the three-cycle system was seen to shorten the study time duration and increase employability of graduates. Whereas the implementation of the formal structure of the Bologna Process was successful, it was often observed that old curriculums were simply transferred into the new system without real reformation (Kloke & Krücken, 2012).

As mentioned above, despite raising student numbers funding for teaching has decreased over the last years (Stifterverband, 2008b). While the reform could foster change in the organization of teaching and learning still a lack of financial resources was present. Furthermore, since prestige, reputation and third stream funding are often only linked to research achievements, the motivation to invest into teaching from an organizational



perspective is low, since no incentives are given (Becker, 2012). Another problem is the ‘Capacity Decree’ (‘Kapazitätsverordnung’). This Decree leads to the problem that reducing student teacher ratio is hard, because when a new professor is hired, the universities have to increase their capacity; because of this the student-teacher ratio will not be lower and will stay the same (Stifterverband, 2008b).

The introduction of tuition fees was one solution to the need for extra funding. Traditionally, German universities did not charge tuition fees and higher education was mainly publicly funded by the Länder. However, from 2005 onward the Länder were allowed to introduce tuition fees. Although it was planned to forbid the introduction of tuition fees in the new ‘Framework Act for Higher Education’ (Hochschulrahmengesetz), this was rejected after legal action by some Länder (Jungblut & Weber, 2012). In the term of 2007/08, seven Länder introduced tuition fees (Jaeger, 2011). The discussion about the introduction of tuition fees was intense and led to many student protests. Nevertheless, the situation was not stable and due to changes in political power, the fees were rejected again in nearly all Länder in 2011 (Jaeger, 2011).

Another attempt to invest in teaching was the ‘Higher Education Pact’ (Hochschulpakt) an initiative by the federal government and the Länder. Between 2007 and 2010 about 1.13 million Euros were invested in higher education (Hahn, 2007). This initiative was introduced mainly to increase capacity or to hold the level of quality but not to increase the quality. Furthermore, compared to investment in research the sum is marginal (Becker, 2012).

Due to the changes in the funding system in research and the ‘Excellence Initiative’, there was an awareness that both tasks become more distinct and that an increase in the quality of teaching is not on the institutional agenda if no incentives are available. In an interview in 2007, the president of the KMK articulated his position against tuition fee and the need for an excellence initiative for teaching (DAPD, 2007). In January 2008, the Stifterverband announced the concept of a teaching excellence initiative. They wanted to invest up to 5 million Euros for a teaching excellence initiative. At this time, they were in a negotiation process on cooperation with the KMK (Stifterverband, 2008c). In March 2008, the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ was officially announced by the Stifterverband and the KMK. As opposed to the ‘Excellence Initiative’ in research, where a clear focus is set on creating top institutions and system stratification, the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ always includes the raise of quality for the whole system.

## 2.2.4 ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’

The initiative studied ran from 2010 to 2012 and was supposed to only run a single time. During this time frame, 10 million Euros were invested, of which up to one million Euro could be awarded to a single institution. The competition was open to all public- and state-recognized higher education institutions (KMK, 2008; Stifterverband & Kultusministerkonferenz [KMK], 2008).

The ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ was organized by the KMK and Stifterverband. The Stifterverband is a “(...) *private, dedicated and not-for-profit association*” (Stifterverband, web page-a) and its aim is to contribute to the renewal of the German higher education system, to improve conditions for research and to improve quality in teaching.

The purpose of the initiative is to develop excellent teaching, to strengthen the teaching function and to increase the attractiveness of undergraduate programs in Germany. Additionally, the program is seen to function as an impulse for the dynamic development of teaching in the whole system (Stifterverband & KMK, 2008). All in all, 108 institutions participated in the competition. At the end, six universities and four universities of applied sciences were announced as winners (Stifterverband, web page-b). In the following table the six honored universities, which will be under investigation, are listed.

Translated Name of Institution*	Original Name of Institution	Abbreviation
Technical University of Aachen	Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen	RWTHA
Bielefeld University	Universität Bielefeld	UB
University of Freiburg	Albert-Ludwigs-Universität-Freiburg	ALUF
Technical University of Kaiserslautern	Technische Universität Kaiserslautern	TUK
Technical University Munich	Technische Universität München	TUM
University of Potsdam	Universität Potsdam	UP

Table 2: Honored Institutions (Name and Abbreviation)

\*Translated names are taken from the websites of the universities, the names of the ‘Technische Universität München’ and ‘Technische Universität Kaiserslautern’ has been translated by the author since no English translation is provided by the institution.

To assure the sustainability of the competition and the impact on the whole system, all winning institutions had to participate in a ‘quality circle’ (Qualitätszirkel), in which the

institution should develop standards for quality teaching at higher education institutions (Stifterverband & KMK, 2008).

The competition focused on institutional strategies to raise the quality of teaching, with an emphasis on undergraduate education. Strategies proposed in the applications could focus on specific disciplines but should always indicate an overall development for the whole institution (KMK, 2008). Criteria for selection were diverse and ranged from past performance to the development of activities in the future. Furthermore, the applications should indicate that the documents 'Recommendation for Quality in Teaching and Learning' by the 'German Council of Science and Humanities' (Deutsche Wissenschaftsrat (short: WR)) and the document 'Quality Assurance for Teaching' by the KMK were recognized (KMK, 2008; Stifterverband & KMK, 2008). These two documents will be used for analysis.

The selection process separated universities and universities of applied sciences to recognize the differences between the two types of institutions. Each selection committee was made up of 12 experts, of which at least two had to be students, as well as one an international German-speaking expert. Half of the group was selected by the KMK and the other by the Stifterverband. Additionally, two representatives from the KMK, one from the 'German Rectors Conference' (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz) and one from the WR participated without voting rights (KMK, 2008). The selection process took place between March and December 2009 and was divided into two phases. In the first phase institutions were asked to hand in a draft proposal. This proposal should not exceed five pages and should consist of a SWOT-Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis) of the teaching function at the institution and a description of the planned strategies. In the second stage selected institutions were asked to write a full proposal. The selection of winning institutions was based on the judgments of the full proposals and on an on-site visit (KMK, 2008; Stifterverband & KMK, 2008).

The strong need for such an initiative is obvious when taking into account that 60% of all universities in Germany applied for the competition (Stifterverband, web page-b). The initiative brought the discussion about quality teaching on the agenda, and it was the first attempt to introduce competitive funding in relation to teaching with a relatively high amount of money.

### 2.2.5 Other Initiatives and Developments

As mentioned, the need to raise quality in teaching in times of decreasing budgets and rising student numbers in Germany has become important. Besides the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ also other initiatives have emerged. The ‘Federal Ministry for Education and Research’ (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (short: BMBF)*), the ministries of the Länder and several foundations, especially the Stifterverband, announced several other initiatives that can be regarded as the main actors (Becker, 2012). The BMBF has invested 2 billion Euros in the ‘Teaching Quality Pact’ (*Qualitätspakt Lehre*) to develop teaching quality at higher education institutions. Here, 186 institutions are benefiting from this program (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2013).

Besides initiatives to strengthen the status of teaching, the BMBF in 2007 announced research money for research projects to professionalize teaching in higher education (*Hochschulforschung als Beitrag zur Professionalisierung der Hochschullehre*). Research projects in this funding line should contribute to producing knowledge about the effects of recent reforms and about solutions to recent problems (Becker, Krücken, & Wild, 2012). All this may influence the status of teaching and may lead to raising the quality of teaching in Germany.

In the past few years, many initiatives have emerged to raise the quality of teaching. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, compared to research initiatives, the actual amount which is invested in teaching in order to increase the quality in teaching is still much lower (Becker, 2012).

## 2.3 Structuring Teaching Excellence

Teaching excellence is described in the literature as a “*multidimensional*” (Elton, 1998) “*socially constructed*” (Rostan & Vaira, 2011) or “*contested value-laden concept*” (Skelton, 2005). Definitions of teaching excellence are diverse and far from being uniform, and in addition a lack of research is recognized (Skelton, 2005).

The diverse understandings of teaching excellence result from the different conceptions of where excellence in teaching is positioned and from the diverse understandings of what is meant by teaching. Some understandings of excellence in teaching are based on the individual

teacher; others refer to the work of teams or to the organization of study courses or programs or are based on institutional conditions and cultures.

According to Elton (1998), excellence can occur at all levels in higher education. He divides the concept into two dimensions. The first dimension is *classificatory* and distinguishes between levels at which teaching excellence can be positioned, namely, the institution, the department and the individual level. The different levels should be considered separately, and at each one excellence can occur but is of a different kind. He argues that the binding element between the levels is the purpose of teaching excellence which is to increase student learning. The second dimension is of *substantive* nature and describes how excellence can be reached at the different levels.

It is important to consider that according to Elton (1998), these levels are not cumulative so that e.g. a department is not excellent if all members are considered to be excellent and that an excellent institution is not an institution of just excellent departments. Apart from the importance of individual teaching excellence he argues that to ensure excellence at the other levels is important as well.

A similar systematization is used by Little et al. (2007) in which the division described above is further developed. Here four levels are distinguished: system, institutional, department and individual. Additionally, each level again differentiates between teaching and learning. In the article various papers and policies about teaching excellence are reviewed to examine the different uses of the concept according to the described classifications. The amount of references varies between the different categories. Much literature was about institutional strategies to promote excellence teaching, whereas excellence in learning at all levels was underrepresented.

The conceptions of excellence at the different levels are diverse as well. Regarding individual teaching excellence, excellence has many different definitions. Sometimes teaching excellence is seen as competence. Here, excellence is expressed by a teacher who displays specific competencies in teaching. Other authors distinguish excellence from competence. According to Elton (1998), competence is not equal to excellence, but rather one dimension of excellence. To be recognized as excellent as well as competence, additional characteristics like innovation, reflected practitioner, dimensions of academic leadership and management have to be present as well. Furthermore, excellence at the individual level is sometimes

equally applied to scholarship of teaching. Scholarship of teaching according to Shulman (2003) has three important features: it includes going public with innovative ideas, openness to criticism and evaluation and has a conception to include other scholars. According to Shulman (2003) this form of excellence is a meta-form of excellence and combines excellence in teaching praxis with inquiry in teaching and learning. Gibbs (2008) found different understandings of scholarship of teaching in teaching award schemes. For example, some schemes defined scholarship of teaching as reflections done by teachers on the teaching process, other schemes had a broader definition and include pedagogical research as a main component of scholarship of teaching.

Excellence in teaching at the departmental level is mostly connected to the work of teams. In this regard, excellence at this level is judged by how teams of teachers work together and shape conditions for students (Elton, 1998). Furthermore, teaching approaches like student-centered learning and the nexus between research and teaching are seen as measurements for excellence at these levels. It is important for excellence at this level that it accepts disciplinary differences in the definitions of excellence (Little et al., 2007). According to Fanghanel (2007), the department, as the level at which courses and programs are designed is the most important level at which excellence should occur.

Also at the institutional level teaching excellence is defined differently. According to Elton (1998), the influence of the institution in excellence is more indirect through the provision of resources. Additionally, staff development programs and the provision of specific career opportunities for teaching personnel are seen as indicators of excellence at this level (Elton, 1998). According to Little et al. (2007), excellence at the institutional level is expressed through the existence of strategic plans for teaching or when teaching has a prominent status within the institutional culture.

Besides the differences in the conceptions of excellence, also definitions of what counts as teaching are diverse. Often, teaching is defined as the actual process of teaching in the seminar or lecture room. According to Macfarlane (2007, p. 56), teaching is more than the actual teaching process. She divides teaching into three phases, first *pre-performance* which includes all activities that are done before teaching and happen *offstage*, including program design, preparing learning materials and research into teaching. The second phase is the *performance* which is commonly seen as teaching. This is the part which is performed *onstage*, like holding the actual lecture or seminar. The third stage refers to all *post-*

*performance* activities like advising students, assessment and feedback and reflection. Also these activities take place *offstage*. Excellence in teaching in the different stages will be expressed differently and may not only refer to the performance of an individual teacher, which may include his or her preparation and activities that are attached to the lecture, but may also include other actors like academic advisers or even institutional culture.

### **2.3.1 Analytical Framework**

In this study teaching excellence is used, as already mentioned, as an approach of universities to increase the quality in teaching. Similar to the differences in the conception of teaching excellence, strategies to increase the quality of teaching are diverse as well. In different studies and reports various strategies to improve teaching at universities can be found. For example, in a paper by Harrison (2002), strategies improving teaching and learning are linked to the establishment of an institutional teaching culture through e.g. the establishment of centers for teaching excellence, provision of teacher training, faculty evaluation and recognizing and rewarding teaching. In the paper by Felder and Brent (1999), strategies improving the quality of teaching are related to teaching methods and curriculum design. They mention three strategies which lead to better quality in teaching, first the need to write instructional objectives, the use of active learning and third the use of cooperative learning. Besides the differences in strategies, also structuring these strategies is diverse.

Becker and Wild et al. (2012) identified three approaches to improving quality in teaching which were expressed by rectors of German universities in a research project: first, an institutional approach, second a cultural approach and third a personal approach.

The institutional approach assumes that teaching excellence can be achieved by the adjustment of study programs, assisting students, evaluation, provision of resources and professional organization (Becker, Wild, et al., 2012).

The cultural approach to enhancing the quality of teaching is based on strategies that establish a culture of teaching. In this view, teaching excellence will be achieved by promoting and rewarding teaching activities, establishing teaching career opportunities and courses to improve teaching or emphasizing teaching beside research in recruitment processes (Becker, Wild, et al., 2012). Strategies in this approach often relate to procedures which are already in place in the area of research. The goal is to raise its status and thereby motivate staff and

institutions to invest in and develop teaching. According to the study by Becker and Wild et al. (2012), in this approach a concentration on the introduction of some strategies can be recognized, rather than an introduction of many different strategies, as usual in the institutional approach.

The personal approach is based on the view that good teaching is linked to the character of a person. To improve teaching, staff have to be chosen according to their individual character which is dedicated to teaching (Becker, Wild, et al., 2012).

Similarly, Frost and Teodorescu (2001) distinguish between three approaches to improve teaching. The first sees teaching improvement as a behavioral change, the second as a cultural change and the third as a structural change.

The first is represented through evaluation activities, rewards for teaching and faculty development activities. Cultural change is recognized through five themes: “*«Clarifying the institutional mission and educational goals,» «making teaching a priority,» «supporting intellectual community,» «recognizing teaching as a multifaceted activity,» and «understanding the responsibility of students»*” (Frost & Teodorescu, 2001, p. 409).

Structural change is recognize through three activities “*(...) promoting interdisciplinary teaching, (...) implementing change at multiple levels, and (...) improving the physical infrastructure.*” (Frost & Teodorescu, 2001, p. 411)

In this study it will be distinguished between a **structural** and a **cultural** approach toward teaching excellence, both describing different ways for universities to achieve teaching excellence. In the first teaching excellence will be achieved through changes e.g. in study program design or evaluation activities. In the second approach teaching excellence will be achieved through e.g. staff development programs or through rewarding teaching activities.

This framework based on the two studies mentioned above; nevertheless, some adjustments were done since some problems were detected. First, the third approach from Becker and Wild et al. (2012) is based on a personal-oriented approach which will not be used in this study, since this approach emphasizes the individual meaning and cannot be fostered by institutional strategy. Furthermore, the term structural approach better fit to the proposed strategies than the term institutional approach and therefore will be used here. Using the term ‘institutional’ may lead to the impression that the cultural approach can be implemented



without institutional action, whereas no cultural change can occur without these actions. In this study it is argued, that both approaches the structural and the cultural are based on organizational actions but describing two different routes which can be chosen by the universities to achieve teaching excellence. Regarding the structure by Frost and Teodorescu (2001) it is seen as problematic to distinguish between the ‘behavioral approach’ and the ‘cultural approach’. If the change in behavior of the individual is not in the foreground, than the most strategies which are sorted within this approach are from cultural nature and representing specific strategies to operationalize the cultural approach. Furthermore they also mentioned that “(...) both structures and values of an organization influence the behavior of the individuals within it. The organization’s structures and values, in turn, reflect and reinforce the influence of the culture.”(Frost & Teodorescu, 2001, p. 408) This indicates the dependability of the three approaches on each other, so that they may not stand alone.

As mentioned, there are many different strategies which can represent the two approaches. Therefore, in the analytical framework, which is presented in the table below, fields of teaching excellence are established. To manifest the diversity in strategies, codes for the specific strategies will be established inductively.

	<b>Structural Approach</b>	<b>Cultural Approach</b>
Fields of teaching excellence	Conditions	Platform for teaching
	Information/ Advisement	Recruitment process
	Learning/ Teaching situation	Reward / Recognize Teaching
	Measure/ Evaluation activities	Staff development
	Organizational structure	Strategy for teaching
	Program structure/ content	

Table 3: Fields of strategies (Analytical Framework) according to Becker and Wild et al. (2012) and Frost and Teodorescu (2001)

Each field of teaching excellence in the analytical framework can be represented by various strategies. In the following table examples for strategies representing the different fields are presented. These examples are not exclusive, but rather represent typical examples of strategies that enhance teaching at universities found in various academic literature.

Fields	Strategies (Examples from the literature)
Structural Approach	
Conditions	Improving the physical infrastructure*
Information/ Advisement	Support to students**
	Support to students learning**
Learning/ Teaching situation	Use active learning in class***
	Use cooperative Learning***
Measure/ Evaluation activities	Faculty evaluation****
	Assessment and evaluation of teaching quality****
	Feedback loop of QT initiatives on the teacher experience**
	Student evaluation**
Organizational structure	Organisation and management of teaching and learning*****
Program structure/ content	Promoting interdisciplinary teaching*
	Community service work-based programmes, development-based programmes*****
Cultural Approach	
Platform for teaching	Communities of teaching and learning practices*****
Recruitment process	Teaching recruitment criteria*****
	Initial recruitment process of teaching staff**
Reward/ Recognize teaching	Prize endowment for ‘good’ teachers or remarkable QT initiated by teachers**
	Funds to promote motivational teaching**
	Teaching innovation funds*****
Staff development	Teacher Training****
	Continuing education of faculty**
Strategy for teaching	Making teaching a priority*
	Clarifying the institutional mission and educational goals*

Table 4: Example Strategies in the fields of teaching excellence

\*(Frost & Teodorescu, 2001); \*\*(Henard, 2010); \*\*\*(Felder & Brent, 1999); \*\*\*\*(Harrison, 2002);  
\*\*\*\*\* (Henard & Roseveare, 2012)

### 3 Methodology

The aim of the study is to examine the perception of teaching excellence in the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ in Germany. This will be done by analyzing documents related to the competition and the applications from the award-winning universities. As mentioned in the second chapter, the debate about teaching excellence and the specific understanding is linked to overall changes in higher education so that the context of the initiative is seen as important. Therefore, the study is constructed as a case study using qualitative content analysis as a method of analyzing the data.

The term ‘case study’ is used differently in academic literature. Here, it will be used according to Stake (2005), who stated that the term ‘case study’ refers to the design of a study and not to a specific method used. The term as such describes the interest the study has. According to Gerring (2007, p. 20), a case study is defined “(...) *as the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population).*” A case is defined by Gerring (2007, p. 19) as “(...) *a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time. It comprises the type of phenomenon that an inference attempts to explain.*” In line with these definitions, a case study is characterized by a concentration of interest on a special case and its background. The following chart visualizes the research design of this study. It shows the case and its context and also the methods used for analysis. The context of the case is represented through the five circles. They are not directly considered throughout the analysis, but are seen as important information on why and how the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ was initiated, which was presented in the second chapter of the thesis.

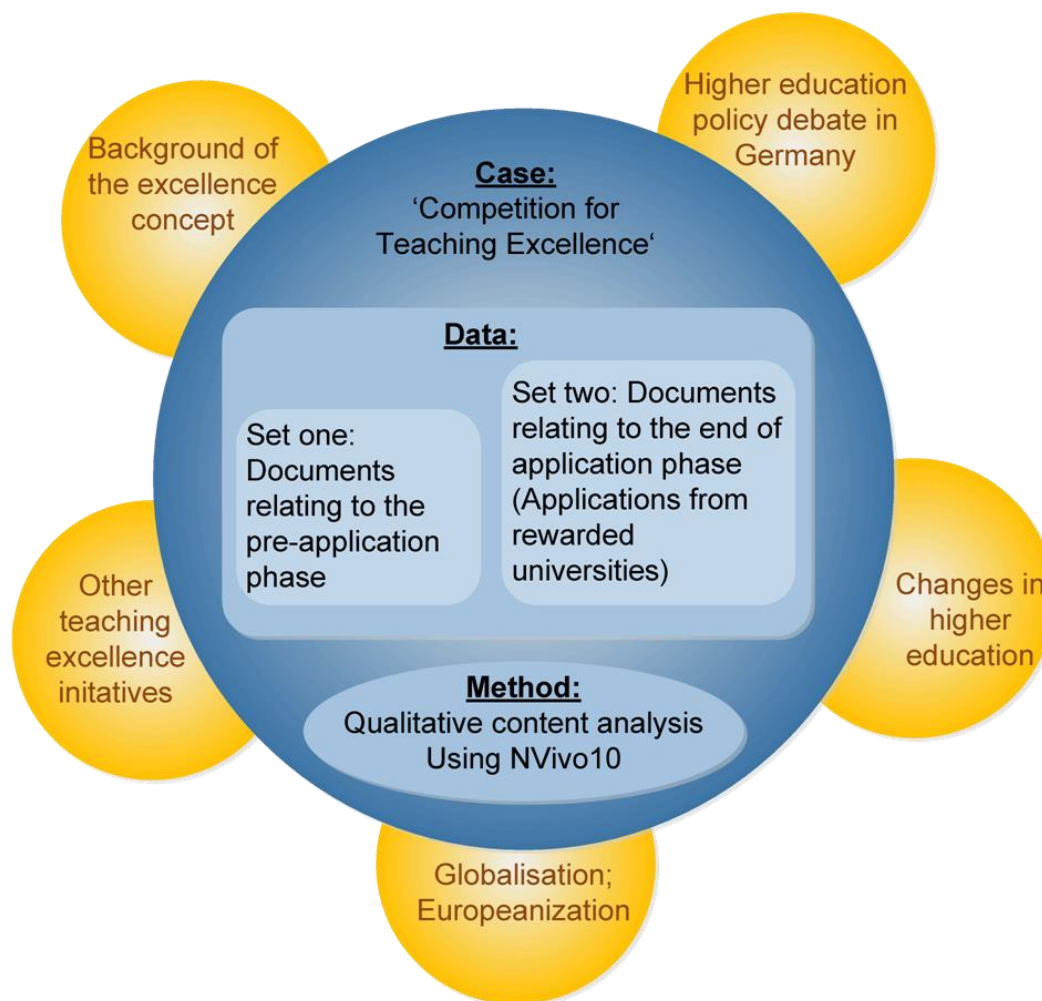


Figure 1: Research design

The rationale of the case selection will be described in the subsection 'Case Selection'. Beside the case selection the sampling method is also important. In qualitative research mostly purposeful sampling is used, this method is defined by Bryman (2008, p. 415) as “(...) a non-probability form of sampling. (...) The goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being posed.” The reason for the selection of the data set and a description of the documents used for analysis is presented in the subsection 'Data'.

This study has a qualitative research approach and uses documents as a data source. In contrast to a quantitative approach, qualitative research focuses on words and not on numbers, which is one of the most obvious differences. Additionally, qualitative research focuses on the view of the participants and is used to obtain detailed information about a subject or process, since the context of this subject is considered as important (Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, the research process in qualitative studies is unstructured and flexible and the aim is to produce

meaning (Bryman, 2008). Often, the approach is connected to an inductive research process, nevertheless, Gibbs (2002, p. 9) argues that *"(...) qualitative analysis commonly involves both deductive (especially hypothesis testing) and inductive reasoning."*

As the method for investigation, qualitative content analysis is chosen. According to Bryman (2008, p. 276), qualitative content analysis is defined as

*(...) an approach to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts. (...), there is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding meaning of the context in which an item being analyzed (and the categories derived from it) appeared.*

The process of analysis according to him *"comprises a searching-out of underlying themes in the materials (...)"* (Bryman, 2008, p. 529). The main procedure of this method is to find categories in the material. The process of categorization is often called coding.

*Codes can represent topics, concepts, or categories of events, processes, attitudes or beliefs that represent human activity, and thought. Codes are used by the researcher to reorganize data in a way that facilitates interpretation and enables the researcher to organize and retrieve data by categories that are analytically useful to the study, thereby adding interpretation.* (Forman & Damschroder, 2007, p. 48)

These codes are either developed deductively through the theoretical framework or inductively through the investigation of the data itself, however, in qualitative studies both methods are often combined (Forman & Damschroder, 2007; Kohlbacher, 2006). According to Gibbs (2002), coding in qualitative and quantitative research is fundamentally different, whereas in quantitative studies coding is used to condense the data, in qualitative research the codes are used to structure the data. *"The researcher does not count the occurrences of the code, rather a link between the code and the coded text is maintained so that by retrieving the code the original words can be displayed (...)." (Gibbs, 2002, p. 4)*

The codes in this study are organized in a tree structure. The parent codes represent the different fields of teaching excellence which are displayed in the analytical framework. During the analysis, the different strategies recommended or proposed in the documents will be sorted into the different fields. To maintain the variance of the strategies, child codes will be established inductively. Thereby, the same strategies are coded with the same child code and different strategies in one field are coded with a different child code. While a pure deductive approach would ignore the variety of strategies existing in the data a pure inductive

approach would lead to problems of generalization of the findings. The combination of both approaches therefore positively influence the generalization of findings, since theory and results of other studies are taken into account, and increase the match between the framework and the data since the variety of possible strategies are recognized.

Besides the above described consideration also quality criteria like reliability and validity are important aspects which should be addressed here. The first refers to random mistakes and the question of whether the instrument employed is trustworthy and if the research can be replicated. The latter is concerned with systematic mistakes. Here the question is asked if the instrument measures what it should measure (Bryman, 2008).

Validity according to Kleven (2008) can be divided into four types: construct, statistical, internal and external validity. Constructed validity is linked to the fit between indicator and construct. Statistical validity is concerned with the relationship between variables and internal validity, and deals with causal relationships between them. External validity is concerned with the generalization of the findings to other contexts or objects. Construct, statistical and internal validity are based on the construct of the study and are related to the sample and theory used in the study. External validity goes beyond this scope, here the question is, to what extent generalizations can be drawn from inferences made (Kleven, 2008).

According to Bryman (2008), some qualitative researchers downgrade the importance of these quality criteria. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994 cited by Bryman, 2008, p. 377) different quality criteria should be used for qualitative research. According to Kleven (2008), this is not necessary since for the quality criteria not the type of data, but the nature of inferences made is important. According to him, it is not the concept of quality criteria which changes, but rather the procedures used being different. In this study the above described quality criteria are used.

According to Creswell (2009, pp. 191-192) there are eight procedures which are commonly used to ensure validity in qualitative research:

- *Triangulation different data sources (...)to build a coherent justification for themes. (...)*
- *Use member checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings (...)*
- *Use rich and thick description to convey findings. (...)*
- *Clarify the bias of the researcher brings to the study. (...)*

- *Also present negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes. (...)*
- *Spend prolonged time in the field. (...)*
- *Use peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account. (...)*
- *Use an external auditor to review the entire project.*

Procedures, which are in the focus of this study, are to describe the analysis procedure as detailed as possible and to make the coding as transparent as possible. Additionally, the quality of data used is in focus, which will be further addressed in the subsection ‘Data’.

Procedures for reliability according to Gibbs (2007 reviewed by Creswell, 2013, p. 203) are:

- *Checking transcripts to make sure that they do not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription.*
- *Make sure that there is not a drift in the definition of codes, a shift in the meaning of codes during the process of coding. (...)*
- *For team research, coordinate the communication among the coders (...)*
- *Cross-check codes developed by different researchers (...)*

To ensure reliability the consistency of coding is important. Since in this study not underlying conceptions but direct stated strategies are coded the consistency of codes can be assured through comparing the results of the different documents. Additionally, the documents were read several times and coding were checked again.

Generalizations of the findings to other initiatives may be not easy since all initiatives can have different perceptions of teaching excellence, however, since the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ was the first attempt of this scale other initiatives may copy procedures from the initiative, and due to this convergence of perception of teaching excellence may occur. Furthermore, the findings of the study contribute to the knowledge base of teaching excellence. The results therefore can be used to compare the German initiatives with other programs to identify similarities and differences.

### **3.1 Case Selection**

The ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ in Germany is the case of examination in this study on teaching excellence. This competition is the major initiative in Germany for strengthening the teaching function in higher education. It was one of the first competitions to

promote teaching and with €10 million it was also one of the major investments to improve teaching quality during that time. It can be seen as related to the ‘Excellence Initiative’, which promotes excellence in research in Germany. Another reason why this competition is chosen is for the different approach that this competition has. Rather than focusing on individual teacher competences like e.g. the NTFS in England, or focusing on the department level like the initiative ‘Centres of Excellence’ in Finland, the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ in Germany focuses on the institutional level. Many studies have already been constructed that examine the understanding of teaching excellence at the individual level, whereas there is a lack of research at the institutional level. Furthermore, this initiative in Germany is one of the first large investments in teaching, since its purpose, besides raising the quality of teaching at the individual institution, is also to influence the conception of teaching excellence by introducing a common understanding of what teaching excellence is.

The German case is of special interest since the initiative there can be seen as a fundamental change in the system since it introduced competitive funding in the area of teaching and thus contributes to the stratification of the system, which is a new feature for the system. Additionally, the initiative with the institutional approach toward teaching excellence can be a model for other initiatives within and outside Europe.

## 3.2 Data

For analysis, documents from the competition will be used. A document according to Scott (1990) is defined as a written text. *“A document is an artifact which has as its central feature an inscribed text.”* (Scott, 1990, p. 5).

Scott (1990, p. 14) classifies documents according to two dimensions, authorship and access. The dimension auf authorship is divided into a personal and an official dimension with the latter being again divided into the dimensions private and state. Thereby documents of the private domain are published by non-state organizations and documents from the state domain are published by the government. The dimension of access is divided into four categories. Closed documents are available just to a specific group of people; restricted documents are available to others with the permission by authorized persons. Open-archival documents are available through libraries or archives, which are open with minimal restrictions. Open-published documents are open to everyone without restrictions.



Documents used in this study are mainly from two categories. The majority of documents are from the category *private open-published*. Some documents, the ones published by the KMK, are *state open-published*. One document, the application from the University of Kaiserslautern, is *private open-archival*. This document was made available through the Stifterverband at the request of the researcher.

Besides categorization of documents, Scott (1990, p. 6) introduces four quality criteria:

*1 Authenticity. Is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?*

*2 Credibility. Is the evidence free from error and distortion?*

*3 Representativeness. Is the evidence typical of its kind, and, if not, is the extent of its untypically known?*

*4 Meaning. Is the evidence clear and comprehensible?*

Regarding the quality of the used documents, the authenticity of the documents is high. All documents are copies of the original document. Copy mistakes are seen as rare since the originals are electronic documents. Additionally, the authorship of all documents is clear. Also the credibility can be regarded as high. All documents are closely related to the competition and therefore can be used to interpret the perception of excellence in the competition. It may be that the applications do not always reflect reality, since the purpose of the application is to win in the competition, nevertheless, the perception of excellence will manifest itself in these documents. To assess the representativeness of the documents is not easy, on the one hand all publicly available documents related to the selection process are used for analysis and all documents are related to the competition, on the other hand there may be some internal documents which may be of interest to include. The problem of the meaning of the documents is small; there is no evidence that there will be problems to interpret the meaning of them.

The documents used in this study can be divided into two sets. The first set of documents is related to the pre-application process, the documents used for analysis are listed in the table below. The documents ‘Recommendations for Quality in Teaching and Learning’ and ‘Quality Assurance for Teaching’ were not written for the competition, and also include recommendations directed towards the Länder and federal level. Therefore, only some parts of the documents will be under investigation.

<b>Title*</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Page nr.</b>	<b>availability</b>
‘Recommendations for Quality in Teaching and Learning’	WR	115	Online
‘Quality Assurance for Teaching’	KMK	19	Online
Announcement	Stifterverband/ KMK	3	Online
Resolution	KMK	5	Online

Table 5: Set one documents

\*Title translated by the author

The second set of documents consists of the applications from the award-winning universities. These documents are related to the application process. Here, just the applications from the honored universities and not the applications from the honored universities of applied sciences are chosen. The reason for this is that on the one hand the application process of the two different types of institution was separated with different expert groups choosing the winners. Secondly, the purpose of both types of institutions is different, the universities of applied sciences are more seen as teaching institutions whereas in universities teaching has to compete more with other tasks like research. Consequently, there are different problems facing both institutions. With that in mind, strategies proposed by both types of institutions have to be seen in different contexts and realities. Including both types of institution therefore would change the purpose of the study.

<b>Title*</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Page nr.</b>	<b>Availability</b>
‘Students in Focus of Excellence’	RWTHA	27	Online
‘Methods for a New Teaching and Learning Culture’	UB	12	Online
Windows for Higher Education	ALUF	15	Online
‘Students as partners’	K		Available after request at Stifterverband
‘Focus on Teaching’	TUM	14	Online
‘Teaching and Learning at the University of Potsdam - Reflected, Distinguished, Research-based’	UP	14	Online

Table 6: Set two documents

\*Title translated by the author

### **3.3 Analytical Process**

The process of analysis can be divided into two phases. In the first phase the focus will be on the pre-application phase of the competition. Here, the set one documents are in focus. In the analysis the selection criteria and strategies recommended in the documents named above will be categorized according to the analytical framework.

In the second phase, the applications of the universities will be examined. First, the applications will be compared with regard to formal structure. Then, the content will be analyzed. Here, the proposed strategies of the universities will be categorized with regard to the framework.

#### **3.3.1 Computer- Assisted Analysis**

The analysis of the documents will be done with the help of an computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (short: CAQDAS). Bryman (2008) discusses the advantages and disadvantages of using CAQDAS. As one major disadvantage, the de-contextualization of texts through the coding process in CAQDAS is named. Since in this study, the focus is set on the strategies this is not seen as a problem. Furthermore, memos are used to link description of the strategies to the coded area to manifest the context of the strategies. It is stated as a advantage that when using CAQDAS, the process of coding can be faster and more efficient and that the coding process is more transparent (Bryman, 2008). Nevertheless, the use of a software for analysis is not a guarantee for better quality, moreover, the researcher still has to decide about the coding and the interpretation of the results (Gibbs, 2002).

In this study NVivo10 was used. NVivo10 was chosen because this software allows the coding of small units of text (Gibbs, 2002). In the software, codes are named nodes and can be ordered as free or tree nodes (Gibbs, 2002). The tree node function is chosen here to display the belonging between the nodes. Furthermore, in this software the codes can be deductively or inductively established. Here, a combined approach will be used. Before the analysis of the documents, the fields of teaching excellence of the analytical framework are entered as nodes in NVivo10. During the analysis the identified strategies are coded into child nodes related to the specific field of teaching excellence. Similar or identical strategies are coded with the same child code. Additionally, important details about the strategies are linked to a memo to be able to compare the different descriptions of the strategies later on.

## 4 The Award-Winning Universities

In this section an overview of the honored universities will be given. Therefore, a comparison of the institutions according to location, size, age, type and success in the excellence initiative will be given. Furthermore, as additional information this will be compared with the institutions which were selected to write a full application but were not selected in the second selection round. The following table presents the name of these institutions.

<b>Translated Name of Institution*</b>	<b>Original Name of Institution</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>
University Bremen	Universität Bremen	UBr
Technical University Darmstadt	Technische Universität Darmstadt	TUD
University Göttingen	Georg-August-Universität Göttingen	GAUG
University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf	Universitätsklinikum Hamburg-Eppendorf	UHE
University of Kassel	Universität Kassel	UK
University of Paderborn	Universität Paderborn	UPa
Combined Application (University of Erfurt, University of applied science Erfurt, Ilmenau University of Technology, Bauhaus University Weimar* (Fraunhofer Institute for Digital Media Technology))	Verbundsantrag (Universität Erfurt, Fachhochschule Erfurt, Technische Universität Ilmenau, Bauhaus Universität Weimar (Fraunhofer Institut für - Digitale Medientechnologie))	VA

Table 7: Universities selected to submit full applications (Excluding honored universities)

\*Translated names are taken from the websites of the universities, the names of the ‘Technische Universität Darmstadt’ and ‘Georg-August-Universität Göttingen’ have been translated by the author since no English translation is provided by these institutions.

In the following map the location of the honored universities and the location of the Universities which were selected to write the full proposal are displayed.

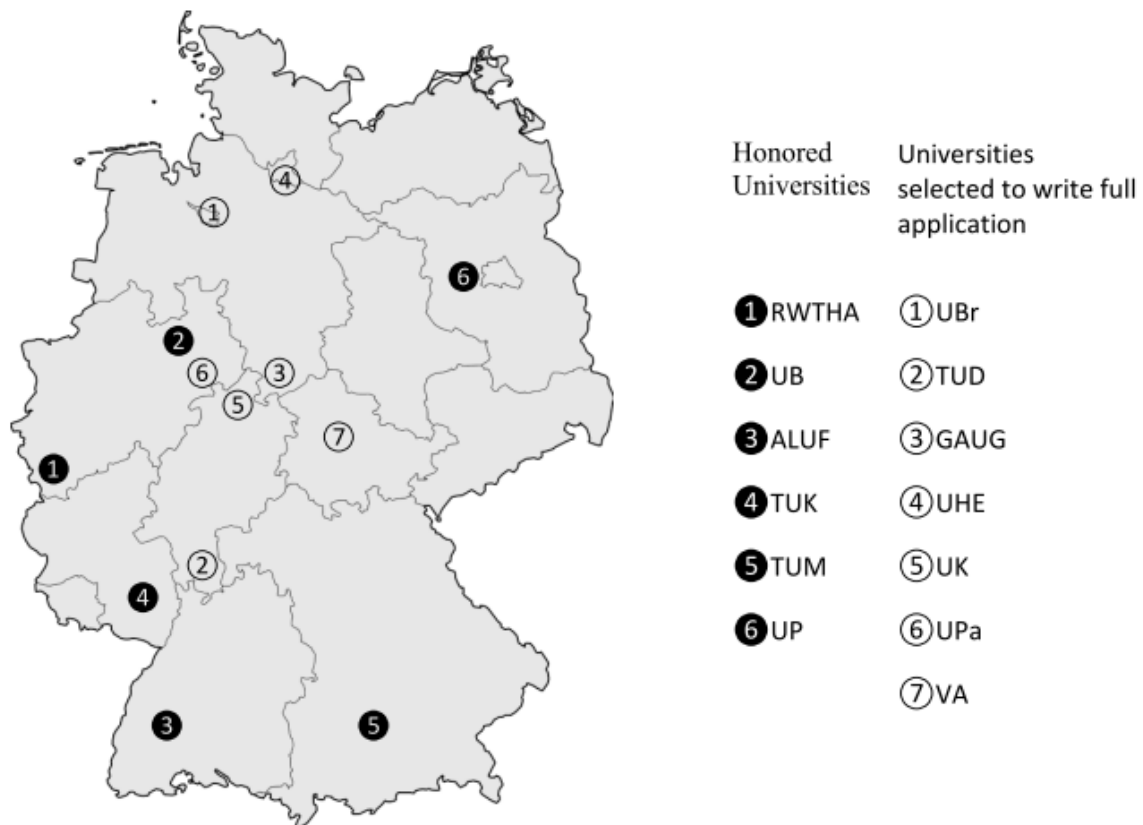


Figure 2: Finalist universities and their location (Map adapted from Landkartenindex, 2000)

After the first selection round the selected universities were found to be distributed from north to south with an emphasis on the western part of Germany. The honored universities are mainly located in west and south Germany. The north of Germany was not represented and from the eastern part only Potsdam was selected.

Apart from the location the selected institutions vary according to size, age, status and success in the 'Excellence Initiative' for research. In the following table the characteristic of each university according to the stated features is presented.

<b>University</b>	<b>Size*</b>	<b>Age**</b>	<b>Type***</b>	<b>Success in 'Excellence Initiative' for research****</b>
RWTHA	Large (33.021)	Traditional (1870)	TU	E
UB	Middle (17.703)	New (1969)	U	e
ALUF	Large (20.681)	Traditional (1457)	U	E
TUK	Middle (11.978)	New (1970)	TU	0
TUM	Large (24.148)	Traditional (1868)	TU	E
UP	Large (20.364)	New (1991)	U	0
UBr	Middle (16.936)	New (1971)	U	e
TUD	Large (20.252)	Traditional (1877)	TU	e
GAUG	Large (23.263)	Traditional (1737)	U	E
UHE*****	--	--	MF	0
UK	Middle (19.291)	New (1971)	U	0
UPa	Middle (14.321)	New (1972)	U	0
VA	Small (5052, 4635, 6159, 3679)	New/Traditio nal (1994, 1991, 1894, 1860)	U, TU, FH	0

Table 8: Characteristics of universities (All institutions selectet to submit full applications)

\*Size: small: <10.000 middle; 10.000-20.000; large: >20.000 (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2009) \*\*Age: Traditional: institution founded before 1960; New: institution founded after 1960 (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz [HRK], 2013) \*\*\*Type: U: University; TU: Technical University; MF: Medical Faculty; FH: University of Applied Science (HRK, 2013) \*\*\*\* Success in 'Excellece Initative' for E: Honored

in the research excellence initiative research in 2005-2012 in the third line (Excellence university); e: Honored in the research excellence initiative in 2005-2012 in the first line (Graduate school) and in the second line (research cluster); 0: not successful in the initiative in 2005-2012 (DFG, 2011) \*\*\*\*\* There are no informations available about the size and age of the medical faculty therefore no informations are given here.

After the first selection round the characteristics age, type and success in excellence initiative are nearly equally distributed among the selected institutions. Regarding the characteristic size, it is obvious that small institutions are underrepresented. It is noticeable that the two applications from small institutions have a further specific feature. In the case of the application from UHE, the medical faculty and not the whole university applied. The faculty belongs to the University of Hamburg, but because of the education system for doctors in Germany, they have a specific status within the university. In Germany, medicine and law are not part of the educational reform subjected to the Bologna Reform. The education system in medicine is often still a one-cycle qualification with a practical phase after the university phase. In the case of the combined applications, the application is linked to more than one institution, here two universities and one university of applied sciences applied together. These applications are therefore also special in accordance to other features than the size of the institution.

With regard to the second selection round, the characteristics are equally represented among the selected institutions; however, small institutions are not represented. Furthermore, since about 60% of all universities applied for the competition these patterns are interesting and may indicate political factor in the selection process. Questions are arising as to why institutions located in east and north Germany are underrepresented and why small institutions are not represented among the winners at all. This study will not answer these questions, but they will be considered in the discussion of the results.

# **5 Results**

In this chapter the results of the analysis will be presented. The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, the results from the set one documents, which are linked to research question A, will be presented. This part again will be subdivided into two parts. The first one focuses on the announcement and the resolution of the competition and the second one on the documents from the WR and the KMK which should be used as a basis for the applications. In the second part, the results of the analysis of the applications will be presented. Here, the focus is set on research question B.

## **5.1 Frame of the Competition**

### **5.1.1 Announcement and Resolution**

In the KMK (2008) resolution for the competition and in the announcement by the Stifterverband and the KMK (2008) no clear description of the concept of teaching excellence is presented.

In both documents the procedures and goals of the competition are described. With the provision of financial incentives the initiators want to stimulate institutions to develop teaching at the institution and thus increase the attractiveness of undergraduate education in Germany (Stifterverband & KMK, 2008). Besides raising quality teaching at the selected universities, the initiators also want to stimulate the whole system. With the establishment of the ‘Quality Circle’ the impact on the whole system and sustainability of the competition should be guaranteed.



The following table shows the selection criteria stated in the two documents:

Resolution		Announcement	
1	Past performance indicated by educational measurements (low dropout rate, very good external evaluation results)	4	Application indicates a prominent position of teaching within institutional profile (is concerned by quality management and strategic planning)
2	Staff development concept (qualification of teachers, recognizing teaching performance during the recruitment process, performance-based payment)	5	Applications show that they used the recommendations made by the KMK and the WR
3	Quality management systems (including student participation)	6	Applications indicate innovation
		7	Acceptance by students and teachers of proposed strategies
		8	Realizability of strategies with resources and conditions
		9	Sustainability of strategies

Table 9: Selection criteria (KMK, 2008; Stifterverband & KMK, 2008)

The selection criteria are diverse and do not indicate a specific perception of teaching excellence. Both the cultural and structural approach are represented in these criteria, the criteria number two indicate the cultural perspective, whereas number three represent the structural approach. The other criteria do not indicate a specific approach, but rather concern formal settings of the competition or characteristics of the applications.

### 5.1.2 Recommendations by the WR and the KMK

Both documents should be used as a foundation for the applications and therefore have an important role in the competition. Nevertheless, the documents are not written for the competition and also contain strategies relating to the Länder level.

The document from the WR (2008) is structured into two parts. The first presents the actual situation and problem description of the teaching function at German higher education institutions. In the second part, which will be analyzed, recommendations to increase the quality of teaching at universities are presented. The recommendations are directed towards all actors and levels in higher education. Since this study focuses on the recommendations

regarding the institutional and department level only recommendations concerning these levels are selected. In the document the recommendations are structured into seven sections:

- 1. The liability of programs and professionalization and development of counseling of students*
- 2. Qualification for teachers*
- 3. Differentiation of teaching personal*
- 4. Accountability and measuring teaching quality*
- 5. Quality management system for teaching and learning and goal formulation for teaching as well as clear organizational structure and establishment of incentives for teaching development*
- 6. Autonomy and competition for institutions*
- 7. Better teacher-student ratio and availability of resources for teaching and learning* (WR, 2008, pp. 54-55 Translated by the author)

The document from the KMK (2005) can also be subdivided into different parts. In the first part, the document describes strategies which are already in place to assure quality in teaching and learning, here the focus is set on the federal and Länder level. The focus lies on the implementation of the Bologna Reform, the introduction of accreditation systems, the establishment of common standards between the Länder and the development of the national qualification framework. In the second part the document presents strategies for quality teaching, here strategies related to accreditation, evaluation, counseling of students and qualification of teacher are presented. Furthermore, it is stated that a focus on transition phases (school-university; Bachelor-Master; Master-Job market) should be set. Additionally, the need for extra funding and a need for a ranking in teaching are emphasized. In the third part, the document presents fields for strategies. In the appendix different strategies from different Länder are presented as good examples.

Whereas in the document from the WR (2008) direct recommendations are presented, in the document from the KMK (2005) the focus is set on strategies which have already been implemented in the different Länder, these strategies are seen as good examples and are taken as recommendations to increase teaching quality. In the document the strategies are linked to legal changes, nevertheless, some of the strategies can also be implemented by institutions without legal change. The analysis focuses on these latter strategies.

In both documents a variety of different strategies are recommended and represent both approaches of teaching excellence. The document from the WR (2008) recommends many diverse strategies related to ten out of the eleven fields of the analytical framework. In the document from the KMK (2005) fewer strategies are found, here strategies are related to eight of eleven fields. Mostly, the strategies are recommended by one of the documents, only five strategies are found in both documents.

Analyzing the results from both documents, more strategies are related to the structural approach, whereas the cultural approach as a way of enhancing teaching at higher education institutions is directly stated in the document from the WR (2008). In the document it is stated that the goal is to “(...) *implement a new learning culture, which is recognized through a higher status of teaching and learning, the recognition of commitment in this area and a permanent effort to improve.*” (WR, 2008, p. 54 Translated by the author)

In both approaches a variety of strategies are proposed. In the structural approach most recommendations refer to the field of ‘program structure/ content’. In the cultural approach the most recommendations are found in the field of ‘staff development’.

In the following two figures, strategies recommended in the documents are presented according to the analytical framework.

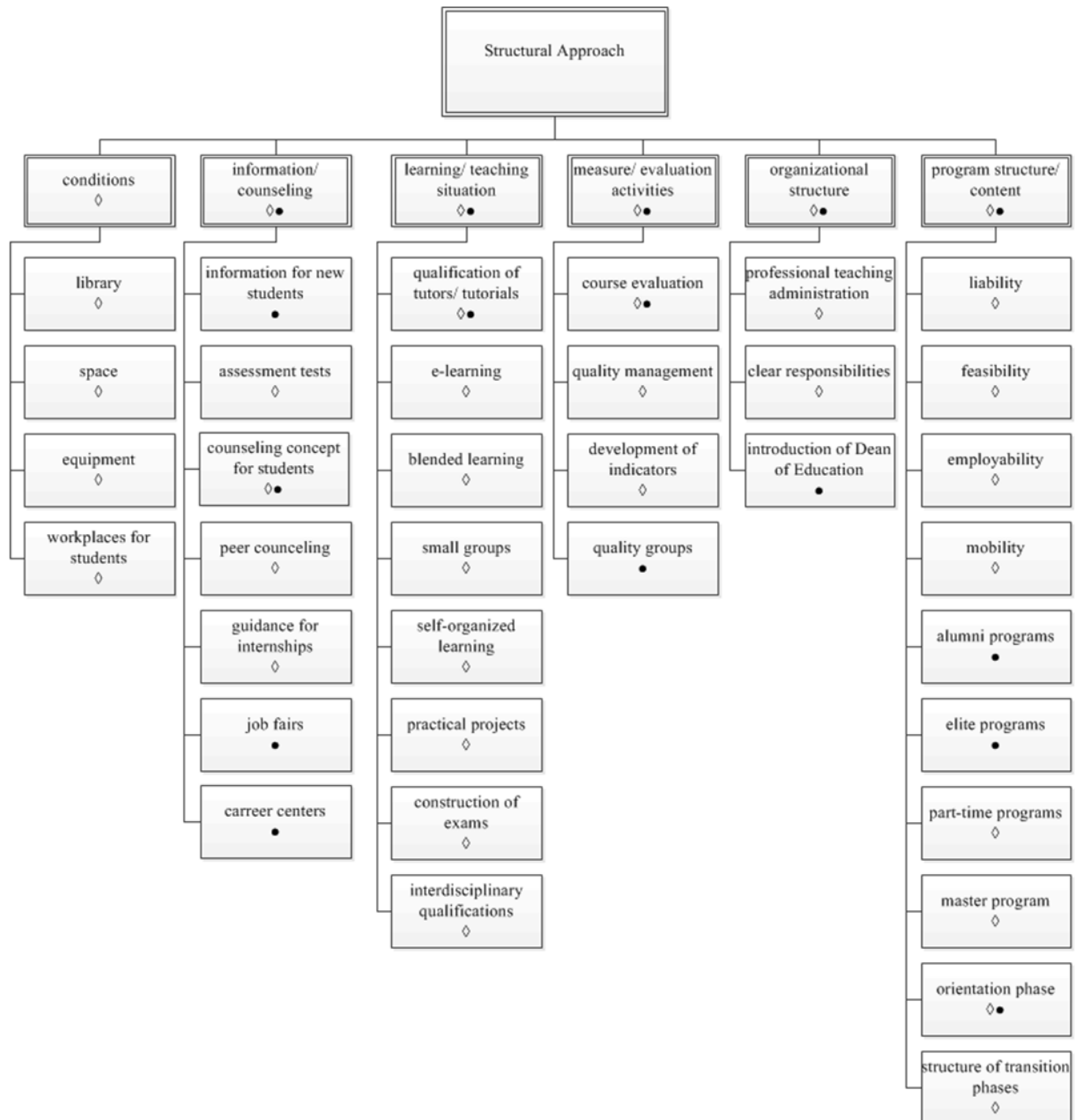


Figure 3: Strategies recommended by the KMK (2005) and the WR (2008) (Structural Approach)

(◊ = WR; • = KMK)

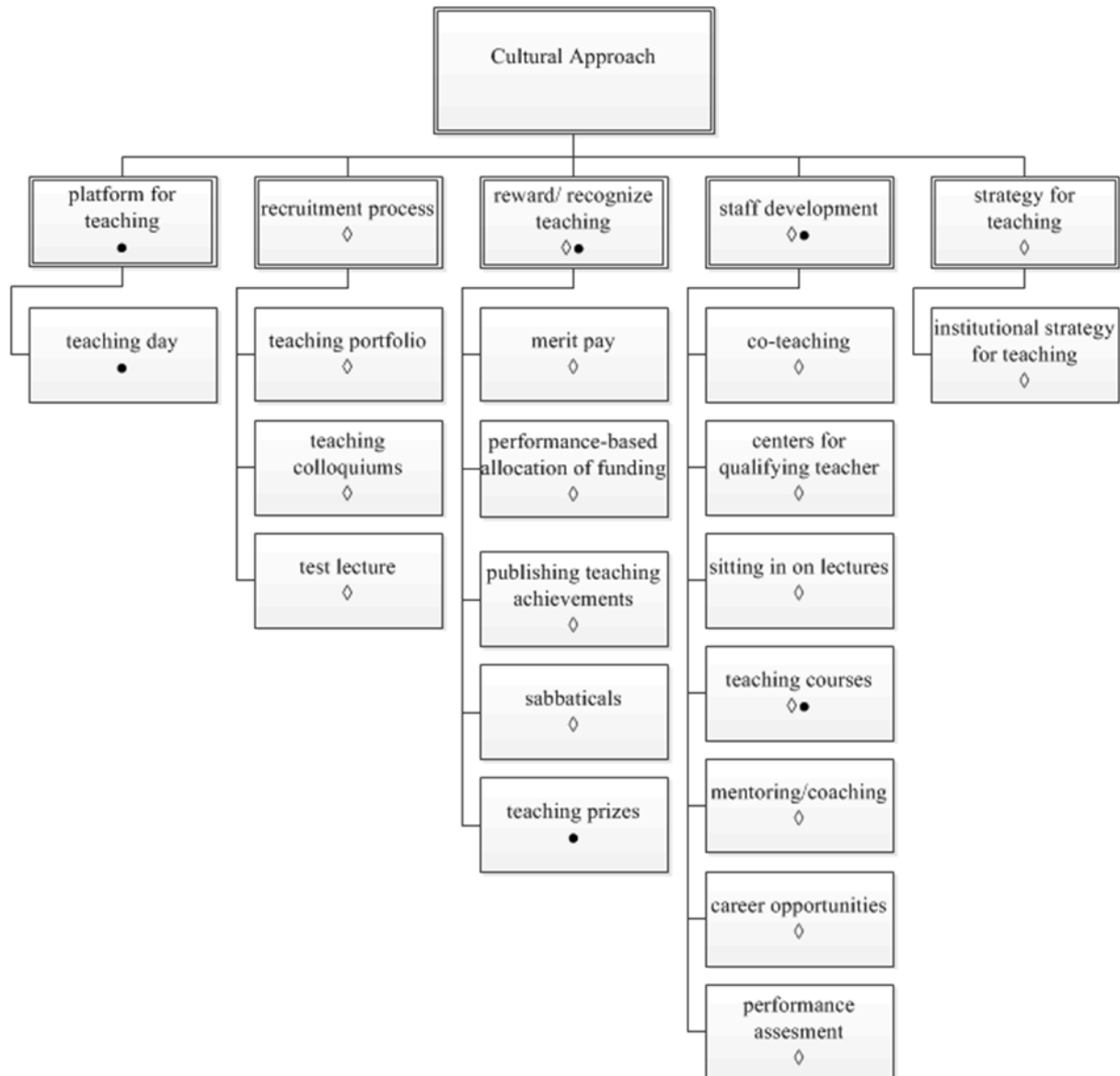


Figure 4: Strategies recommended by the KMK (2005) and the WR (2008) (Cultural Approach)

(◊ = WR; • = KMK)

As shown, the recommended strategies are diverse. Furthermore, the description of these strategies is diverse within the documents. Some strategies are described in detail, whereas others are only named without further explanations. In the following part, the different strategies and how they are described in the documents will be presented.

## **Structural Approach**

### **Conditions**

Conditions are recognized as important for the quality of teaching. In the document from the WR (2008) especially the opening times of libraries, sufficient space and equipment and work-place for students are seen as important. Other recommendations concerning conditions are linked to financial issues and therefore directed towards the Länder level which is not considered here.

### **Information/ Counseling**

In this field the recommended strategies can be divided into three groups.

In the first group, the strategies focus on prospective students. The KMK (2005) recommends establishing information platforms on websites for prospective students and providing detailed descriptions of study opportunities. In the document from the WR (2008) it is recommended to introduce assessment tests for prospective students.

In the second group strategies are linked to general student counseling activities. Both documents express the need for a professional and systematic student counseling concept for institutions. Therein the focus should be set on transition phases. Availability of counselors and the introduction of mandatory counseling at different stages are seen as important. Besides professional counseling, peer counseling especially in the first semester, is seen as important (Kultusministerkonferenz [KMK], 2005; WR, 2008).

The third group refers to counseling and information for students on the job market. Here it is recommended to help students to obtain internship positions and contacts to employees through e.g. the organization of job fairs or the establishment of career centers (KMK, 2005; WR, 2008).

### **Learning/ Teaching Situation**

In both documents it is recommended to introduce tutorials, especially for large lectures.

Furthermore, in the document from the WR (2008, p. 64 Translated by the author) it is stated that *“the development of curricular, learning situations and type of examinations”* are needed. Therefore, the development and introduction of e-learning and blended learning are

recommended. Furthermore, it is recommended to lower the size of classes and to introduce more self-organized learning activities and to promote practical projects. Regarding exams it is recommended to use reports to give feedback to students and not only grades (WR, 2008). Furthermore, it is recommended to qualify students in interdisciplinary knowledge.

### **Measure/ Evaluation Activities**

Both documents recommend the introduction of course and program evaluation. It is seen as important that the goal of evaluations is to increase quality. The WR (2008) also recommends establishing quality management systems. Therein the participation of students is seen as important. Another strategy refers to the measurement of educational success and performance. It is recommended to develop valid indicators to measure the competence development of students and instruments to measure education performance. In these, a balance between input and output measurements is seen as important. The KMK (2005) recommends the introduction of ‘quality groups’ to develop quality criteria within the institution.

### **Organizational Structure**

In both documents, recommendations are not directly linked to changes of the organizational structures, but rather concerned with task division. In this field the WR (2008) recommends introducing professional administration for teaching and having clear responsibilities. In the document from the KMK (2005) it is stated that in some Länder the responsibility of a Dean of Education has been increased and that this has had a positive influence on quality assurance.

### **Programs Structure/ Content**

As shown in figures three and four, various strategies are proposed in this field. The recommendations can be structured into three groups.

The first group is related to overall program features, strategies in this group are ‘liability’, ‘feasibility’, ‘employability’ and ‘mobility’. In the document from the WR (2008) often no further description of how this should be done by the institution is provided. The strategy ‘alumni programs’ can be seen as one attempt to describe how employability can be

approved. This strategy is described as using the experience of alumni when new courses and program are constructed (WR, 2008).

The second group of strategies is linked to the establishment of specific programs ('elite programs', 'part-time programs' and 'master programs'). The first strategy is recommended by the document from the KMK (2005), there it is recommended to promote elite programs in which a regular quality and output control is implemented and a special focus on teaching is set. The other two strategies are linked to the need for establishing opportunities for non-traditional students.

The third group of strategies is linked to specific phases of programs. ('orientation phase' 'structure transition phases'). Both documents provide recommendations for the first year of study programs. Besides the articulation of a need for an orientation phase, in the document from the WR (2008) it is recommended that in the first year all students should have lectures with professors. In the document from the KMK (2005) it is recommended to establish support courses for new students.

## **Cultural Approach**

### **Platform for Teaching**

In this field it is recommended to establish a 'teaching day' (KMK, 2005). This strategy is not further described.

### **Recruitment Process**

The recruitment process is seen as important for the quality of teaching in both documents. In the document from the KMK (2005, p. 8 Translated by the author) no specific strategy is recommended but it is stated that: *"(...) teaching qualifications should be an significant criteria during the selection process"*. In the document from the WR (2008) three activities to value teaching achievements during the recruitment process are recommended, the use of a teaching portfolio, teaching colloquiums to discuss concepts of teaching and the introduction of test lectures within the process. In all three cases no detailed description is provided.



## Reward/ Recognize Teaching

In this field, different strategies are recommended of which all are linked to incentives for commitment and achievements in teaching. Two strategies, ‘merit pay’ and ‘performance-based allocation of funding’, are related to direct financial incentives for past performance in teaching. Besides financial incentives, the WR (2008) also recommends publishing teaching achievements at an exposed position. Furthermore, the introduction of sabbaticals is recommended. According to the WR (2008, p. 85 Translated by the author), these sabbaticals should be available for “*whole departments, individual teachers and also project teams. The support is either done by allocation of money, additional staff or though the allocation of time (...)*”. Furthermore, in the document from the KMK (2005), the introduction of teaching prizes is recommended, but it is not further described how they should be constructed.

## Staff Development

The strategies recommended in this field can be divided into two groups. The first refers to the qualification of teachers (‘co-teaching’, ‘centres for qualifying teacher’, ‘sit in on lectures’, ‘qualification programs’ and ‘mentoring/ coaching’), the second includes strategies by which these competences are valued in staff development (‘career opportunities’ and ‘performance assessment’).

Regarding the first group, the document from the WR (2008) describes how qualification programs should be organized. According to the document, qualifications of teacher should be systematic. Qualification programs should start during the PhD and continue throughout the career. Also qualification programs should be open to everyone and always certificated (WR, 2008). Additionally, it is described which qualifications should be in focus.

*Qualification programs for teaching should teach methods of teaching and learning. At the first level the focus should be on planning and conductiong of courses, methods to support student learning, planning and onducting of examinations, concepts for quality assurance and development. Follow-up levels can relate to the development of new teaching concepts, or whole programs, the management of study programs and also questions about student counseling and support. (WR, 2008, p. 67 Translated by the author)*

Additionally, in the document from the WR (2008) other activities for developing teaching competences are mentioned (‘co-teaching’, ‘sitting in on lectures’ and ‘mentoring/ coaching’). Only the activity ‘mentoring and coaching’ is further described. It is recommended that faculties organize mentoring and coaching for PhD students. Additionally, it is recommended

to establish centers to qualify teachers. According to the WR (2008), these centers should organize the qualification program. The centers should be service institutions and not undertake research on teaching and learning. According to the WR (2008), research into learning and teaching should be done by disciplinary centers, which should be established as well but on the disciplinary level.

In the second group, ‘performance assessments’ are recommended. According to the WR (2008), these meetings between PhD students and professor and Professor and Dean of Education should be institutionalized. In these meetings *“the performance in teaching and learning should be evaluated, achievements and problems should be identified and agreements for further qualification should be made.”*(WR, 2008, p. 68 Translated by the author) It is mentioned that this should be linked to merit-pay activities and course evaluation.

Furthermore, establishing specific career opportunities for teaching staff and establishing positions with more teaching hours is seen as important. It is recommended to establish positions for professors and young researchers with an emphasis on teaching. These positions should be attractive e.g. through tenure options. Nevertheless, a minimum of 1/3 of each position should be dedicated to research (WR, 2008).

### **Strategy for Teaching**

The WR (2008) recommends developing a strategy for teaching for the institution and in the different faculties. A description of how they should be structured is not provided.

To summarize, in the documents a variety of strategies are proposed, furthermore mostly the strategies are not described in detail and due to this much space for institutional variation is left. The recommendations from the WR and the KMK can therefore be seen as a collection of ideas rather than strict guidelines which have to be followed by the universities. As already mentioned, this is obvious in the selection criteria, where structural components of the applications are in focus rather than a specific perception of teaching excellence. Furthermore, there is no preference for one of the approaches; rather in all documents a combination of both approaches is recognized.

## 5.2 Strategies Proposed by the Universities

The applications of the institutions are all between 12 and 15 pages long (without appendices), however the formal presentation of the applications is different. Only two of the applications (RWTHA; UB) present a table of content at the beginning. Figures, graphs and tables are included to visualize the text in nearly all applications; only in the application from TUM no visualization is used. All applications are signed by the rector and the initiators, only the application from K is also signed by the president of the student union. This was done at the request of the university. In this section a short overview of the different applications will be given, presenting the main conceptions and structures of them.

### RWTHA

In the application from university RWTHA (Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen [RWTHA], 2009). ('Students in Focus of Excellence'), four fields of actions to increase the quality of teaching are identified: students, teacher, teaching and learning concepts and structure and organization. In these fields various strategies are proposed. It is specific for this application that many of the proposed strategies are already in place and should be further developed or implemented throughout the whole institution. Already during the application process a new evaluation procedure was being introduced. Most of the strategies proposed are linked to the whole institution. Nevertheless, some projects are related only to specific faculties. The application is guided by a student-centered view, in which the autonomy of students, social integration and competences are in focus (RWTHA, 2009). In contrast to the other applications, an explicit goal is stated in the application. The goal stated in the application is to decrease the drop-out rate (under 25%) to provide career opportunities for graduates and to increase the identification of students with the institution (RWTHA, 2009). Furthermore, the application is guided by a change of perspective, away from a study program perspective towards an individual student perspective.

### UB

The application ('Ways towards a new Learning and Study Culture') by UB (Universität Bielefeld [UB], 2009, p. 2 Translated by the author) is guided by two main questions: *"How can we support and promote the commitment of teachers to the conventional development of teaching and at the same time strengthen the commitment, autonomy and self-responsibility of students?"* The strategies proposed are directly linked to teaching and learning, in this field

weaknesses were identified during the SWOT analysis. In the application the focus is set on creating new modules with a focus on constructive alignment, the linkage between learning outcome, learning activity and evaluation, and to promote the self-responsibility of students.

## ALUF

The application by ALUF is linked to the institutional research strategy. This is reflected in the name of the two strategies. The application has the title ‘Windows for Education’ and the research strategy is titled ‘Windows for Research’. Furthermore, the title reflects the basis of the application. The proposed strategies are based on the view that the development of teaching at the faculty level, especially through the allocation of time, will lead to excellent teaching.

*A stringent and sustainable development of teaching excellence can only be achieved through faculty-based innovation. Therefore, an allocation of time for the individual (further) development of study programs, teaching projects and future scenarios of teaching and learning has to be provided for academic staff.* (Albert Ludwigs Universität Freiburg [ALUF], 2009, p. 6 Translated by the author)

Furthermore, the freedom of choice for students is seen as important. In order to spread innovative idea at the faculty level it is proposed to establish an online platform to exchange best practices and new teaching concepts.

## TUK

The proposed strategies in the application from TUK (‘Students as Partners’) have a strong focus on student participation. As reflected in the title students are seen as partners. *“In focus are the studnets as partners, who are seen as a constantly renewed engine for innovation.”* (Technische Universität Kaiserslautern [TUK], 2009, p. 1 Translated by the author)

The strategies proposed in the application are based on four principles:

- *incentives should be available for all*
- *high degree of freedom for departments and faculties*
- *transparency of processes and results*
- *good cost/ benefit relation with little bureaucratic work* (TUK, 2009, p. 5 Translated by the author)

There are some specific characteristics in this application compared to the others. First, instead of strategies related to the whole institution, in the application four pilot departments

(Electrical Engineering/ Informationstechnik, Informatics, Machine Engineering/ Process Engineering and Mathematics) are chosen. These faculties should act like role models within the institutions. Nevertheless, some strategies regarding the whole institutions are proposed as well. In addition to the pilot faculties, also new organisational structures are proposed which had been implemented before the final selection round. These new committees decide on specific projects at the faculty level. These projects should be linked to one of six fields which are identified as important. These fields are: tutoring/mentoring, introduction courses, e-learning, initiatives with students as partners, internationalisation and quality assurance (TUK, 2009). These projects belong to the structural approach. They are mainly linked to the fields of 'program structure/ content' and 'learning/ teaching situation'. Even though some similarities to sabbaticals can be found, they are subsumed under the structural approach in the various fields, since a difference to the sabbaticals proposed by the other applications can be seen.

Furthermore, two self-commitments are included in the application, first, the pilot faculties promise to qualify half of their current staff in teaching courses and second, the rectorate commits itself to finance the pilot projects annually with 100000 Euros from the tuition fees and will also provide finances to meet the expenses of the member of the external teaching committee (TUK, 2009). It is not clear if this will also be valid without success in the competition or if this has already been implemented.

## TUM

The application of TUM ('TUM: Teaching in Focus') is linked to other strategies of the institution to increase teaching excellence. Similar to the application from RWTHA, besides the introduction of new strategies, existing strategies are proposed to further develop. The foundation of the established strategies is described as followed. *"The basis for the strategy is a structural link of teaching to the institutional decision structure (...), the consistent implementation of quality management (...) and the development of a conceptual basis for the development of teaching"* (Technische Universität München [TUM], 2009, p. 1 Translated by the author)

Already during the selection process, new structures within the institutional decision structure were implemented. The division between strategies already in place and strategies which will be implemented after selection is not always clear in the application. In comparison to the

other applications the need for research into higher education is mentioned in the application. A higher education research professorship in a newly founded graduate school has been included. Nevertheless, this is not proposed as a strategy for the competition and is therefore not included during the investigation.

UP

The quality strategy of UP (Univesität Potsdam [UP], 2009) ('Teaching and Learning at the University of Potsdam - Reflected, Distinguished, Research-based') focuses on four fields of strategies: the nexus between research and teaching, competence-oriented education, the feasibility of programs, a research- based quality assurance system and a strong link between teaching and the quality culture of the institution. With regards to these fields in the application, three activities which should be developed in the project time are presented. The quality strategy based on five fields: "*(... ) research based teaching and competence oriented teaching, the feasibility of study programs and curricular, a research based quality assurance system and a institutional teaching culture.*" (UP, 2009, p. 2 Translated by the author)

In the following two tables the different strategies proposed by the institutions are presented.

### Structural Approach

Fields	Strategies	RWTHA	UB	ALUF	TUK	TUM	UP
<b>information/ counseling</b>		X					
	student counseling	X					
	information for new students	X					
	assessment tests	X					

(Continious on the next page)

<b>Fields</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>RWTHA</b>	<b>UB</b>	<b>ALUF</b>	<b>TUK</b>	<b>TUM</b>	<b>UP</b>
<b>learning/ teaching situation</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>		
	e-learning				X		
	blended learning	X			X		
	practical projects	X			X		
	qualification of tutors/ tutorials	X	X		X		
<b>measure/ evaluation activities</b>		<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
	quality management	X			X		
	student life cycle evaluation	X					X
	workload evaluation	X			X		
	institutional criteria for program design					X	
	course evaluation					X	
<b>organizational structure</b>		<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
	clear responsibilities	X					
	new decision structures				X	X	
<b>program structure/ content</b>		<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
	orientation phase	X			X		
	part-time programs					X	
	programs for program change					X	
	individual track for students			X			
	programs for international students				X		

Table 10: Strategies proposed by universities (Structural approach)

## Cultural approach

Field	Strategies	RWTHA	UB	ALUF	TUK	TUM	UP
<b>platform for teaching</b>		X	X	X		X	
	meeting/ conferences/ discussions	X				X	
	web-based platform			X		X	
	newsletter	X					
	international cooperations		X				
<b>recruitment process</b>		X				X	
	teaching portfolio					X	
	presentation	X					
	statement from dean of education					X	
<b>reward/ recognize teaching</b>		X	X	X	X	X	
	sabbaticals	X	X	X		X	
	teaching prizes	X			X		
<b>staff development</b>		X	X		X	X	X
	qualifying teaching staff	X	X		X	X	X

Table 11: Strategies proposed by universities (Cultural approach)

The tables shown big differences between the applications of the institutions and that no university proposed exactly the same set of strategies.

Not all strategies mentioned in the pre-application documents are included, and some new strategies are proposed. Also, not all fields are covered. In the cultural approach, the field of ‘strategy for teaching’ and in the structural approach the field ‘conditions’ are not represented. For the first it can be argued that no strategy is proposed in this field since the applications them self can be seen as a strategy for teaching and therefore is represented in all applications.



The applications from the universities differently cover the various fields of the framework. University RWTHA, proposes strategies which are related to nine fields, whereas in the applications from UB (4), ALUF (4) and UP (2), only some fields are covered by the proposed strategies. Furthermore, no application focuses on just one of the approaches toward teaching excellence. Rather, a combination of strategies from both approaches is chosen. According to the institutional features described in chapter four, no pattern of proposed strategies is detected.

Most strategies are only proposed by one or two institutions. In the cultural approach the variation of proposed actions is less than in the structural approach. Here ‘qualification of teachers’ (5) and ‘sabbaticals’ (4) are proposed by nearly all applications. In the structural approach the variation of strategies proposed is higher, here only ‘tutorials’ (3) are proposed by more than two institutions.

However, also when strategies are proposed by more than one institution, the realizations of the strategies are different as well. In the following section these differences will be described.

## **Structural Approach**

The strategies proposed by the universities belong to the fields of ‘information/ counseling’, ‘learning/ teaching situation’, ‘measure/ evaluation activities’, ‘program structure/content’ and ‘organizational structure’. As mentioned above, in this approach most strategies are only proposed by one or two institutions, which results in a high variation between the applications. The proposed strategies will be specified below.

### **Information/ Counseling**

Only in the application from RWTHA strategies in the field ‘information/ counseling’ are proposed. Various strategies are proposed in this field. First, the information for prospective students should be further developed by creating an internet platform and increasing the provision of workshops and opportunities for high school students to visit the university. Furthermore, the existing mandatory assessment test from the faculty of psychology should be implemented in all faculties to give feedback about individual competences before the first semester. For current students the establishment of a counseling concept is proposed. As guidelines from the institutional level, the concept should include mandatory counseling for

students who have less than two thirds of the credit points and for the best 10% of the students at the beginning of the third term. Other regulations should be established at the faculty level (RWTHA, 2009).

### **Learning/ Teaching Situation**

Two institutions (RWTHA and TUK) proposed several strategies in this field. In both cases the strategies are specific for the different disciplines. In the application of RWTHA it is proposed to widen the provision of courses to qualify tutors for their work (RWTHA, 2009). Furthermore, it is proposed to develop a concept for e-learning for the whole institution. Additionally, faculty-specific projects are proposed which deal with e-learning, blended learning, project work and research-based education (RWTHA, 2009). In the application from TUK different projects on the faculty level are proposed. These projects are linked to following strategies: 'qualification of tutors/ tutorials', 'practical projects', 'blended learning', 'e-learning' and 'orientation phase' (TUK, 2009).

In the application from UB it is proposed to establish a module for tutors and interested students in which competences for tutoring will be learned. Furthermore, in this program the students should develop new ideas for peer-learning activities. It is proposed to establish a position to coordinate these activities and to establish an online platform to publish peer-learning activities, materials and new ideas (UB, 2009).

### **Measure/ Evaluation Activities**

Four institutions (RWTHA, TUK, TUM and UP) propose strategies related to this field. In the application of RWTHA it is proposed to further develop existing quality assessment schemes at the faculty level and discuss how they can be implemented in other faculties. During the application process, as already mentioned, a new evaluation scheme was implemented. Furthermore, student workload assessment and evaluation according to the student life cycle will be further developed and implemented (RWTHA, 2009). This is also proposed by UP. Here, the evaluation should be used to identify problems in study programs, whereby the focus of the evaluation will be on the student life cycle (UP, 2009). TUK also proposes the implementation of a quality management system. This system is based on transparency, feedback and strategies after the evaluation of courses being a main feature of the system. Furthermore, the implementation of workload evaluation is proposed (TUK, 2009). In the

application from university TUM it is stated that during the application process institutional criteria for program development were implemented. The proposed strategies in this field focus on course evaluation, by which qualitative methods should be established (TUM, 2009).

### **Organizational Structure**

Three institutions (RWTHA, TUK and TUM) propose changes in the organizational structure. Through the proposed strategies, the responsibilities for teaching and learning issues will be clear. In the application from RWTHA it is proposed to increase the responsibility of the Dean of Education and the Vice Rector of Teaching and Learning (RWTHA, 2009). In the application from TUK, as mentioned above, the establishment of two new structures is proposed: first, a service centre for quality in teaching and learning ('Service-Zentrum für Qualität in Studium und Lehre') and second, an external teaching committee ('Externer Beirat für Studium und Lehre'). The service center has the responsibility to create institution wide instruments for evaluation and will allocate the funding for this project. The external committee will advise the rectorate and departments and will select the candidates for teaching prizes (TUK, 2009).

In the application from TUM changes in the organizational structure were already implemented during the application process. The informal meeting of the Deans of Education was transformed into the 'Parliament of the Deans of Education'. Additionally, a working group 'ExzellenTUM Lehre' as a think tank was established. Here conceptual development for teaching and learning should be discussed (TUM, 2009).

### **Program Structure/ Content**

In RWTHA and TUK the focus lies on changes in the structure of programs in the first semester. In the application from RWTHA it is proposed to change the current structure of introduction and foundation courses. With that, the knowledge gap between school and university should be bridged and the courses should help students to become familiar with the organization (RWTHA, 2009). In the application from TUK foundation courses are to be established in different programs (TUK, 2009).

In the application from ALUF it is proposed to implement an individual track for qualified students. With the introduction of an additional year between the second and third bachelor semester the students should obtain the opportunity to choose individual courses. This

individual track should be available for qualified and motivated students (ALUF, 2009). In the application from TUM it is proposed to develop part-time programs to allow non-traditional students to enter university, furthermore, a specific program for students who want to change subjects should be established. With this program the drop-out rate should be reduced and time lost due to changes should be minimized (TUM, 2009).

## **Cultural Approach**

As seen above, strategies proposed under this approach are related to the field ‘platform for teaching’, ‘recruitment process’, ‘reward/ recognize teaching’ and ‘staff development’.

### **Platform for Teaching**

RWTHA proposes two strategies, first to establish a so-called ‘exploratory teaching space’ by which innovation in teaching should be supported. The idea is borrowed from a similar structure in research. Second, it is proposed to establish quality circles for the different disciplines to exchange ideas and share best practices. Furthermore, university RWTHA proposes to publish a newsletter about teaching for all academic staff (RWTHA, 2009).

In the applications from ALUF and TUM it is proposed to establish a web-based platform to publish teaching achievements and good practices to share this within and outside the institution (ALUF, 2009; TUM, 2009). In addition, in the application from TUM a conference for all newly appointed professors is proposed. With this the opportunity to discuss teaching issues with colleagues should be given. To promote this activity it should be held in a hotel (TUM, 2009).

In the application from university UB it is proposed to further develop cooperation with international experts. Workshops and seminars held by these experts are planned, and the participation at conferences by staff should be financed (UB, 2009).

### **Recruitment Process**

To value teaching achievements during the recruitment process, university RWTHA proposes to establish a second presentation during the selection process. Besides the presentation about a research topic, the applicant should also hold a presentation about a teaching topic (RWTHA, 2009). University TUM proposes to implement an obligatory teaching portfolio to

show the applicant's qualifications in teaching and ensure that the statement of the Dean of Education has a high significance during the decision process (TUM, 2009).

### **Reward/ Recognize Teaching**

In this field three strategies are proposed: the introduction of performance-based funding according to teaching achievements, sabbaticals and teaching prizes. The last two strategies are proposed by more than one institution. However, the realization of these strategies is different.

## Sabbaticals

The goal of the sabbaticals is to provide time and money for staff to develop teaching activities. In the following table features of the proposed sabbaticals are compared.

	<b>RWTHA*</b>	<b>UB**</b>	<b>ALUF***</b>	<b>TUM****</b>
<b>Who</b>	Professors	Individual teachers or teaching teams	Professors with more than four years teaching practice and good qualifications in research	Teaching staff (not specified)
<b>What</b>	Develop teaching concepts or teaching qualifications	Develop (obligatory) courses and modules (focus on constructive alignment and self-directed learning for students)	Develop teaching concepts or activities for quality culture	Develop teaching concepts (especially material and books)
<b>How</b>	Leave from teaching and organizational obligations	Money is awarded for free use (e.g. position for assistants or substitutions)	Leave from teaching and organizational obligations, creation of an assistant position or substitution	Leave from teaching and organizational obligation
<b>Additional information</b>		To assess these actions preliminary and wrap-up meetings with the rectorate will be organized	Three per year with a duration of six to 12 months	

Table 12: Characteristics of the sabbaticals proposed by universities RWTHA, UB, ALUF and TUM

\*(RWTHA, 2009); \*\*(UB, 2009); \*\*\*(ALUF, 2009); \*\*\*\*(TUM, 2009)

Furthermore, in the application from RWTHA a second sabbatical is proposed for young researchers. This sabbatical will be rewarded with extra funding to allow young researchers to develop new teaching concepts (RWTHA, 2009). This strategy is presented under the label of a teaching prize.

## Teaching Prize

At university RWTHA a teaching prize already exists, it is proposed to sponsor other prizes at the faculty level. The prizes should also be available to other staff such as tutors. Good performance should be rewarded materially and immaterially at all levels (RWTHA, 2009). In the application from TUK the implementation of a teaching prize is also proposed. This prize will be available for teams and not individuals; up to 10000 Euros may be awarded (TUK, 2009).

## Staff Development

Although all the strategies proposed in this field are linked to the strategy ‘qualify teachers’, the specific concepts are diverse.

At institution RWTHA courses to qualify teacher are already in place. It is proposed to develop these courses and widen the opportunities. For new professors, it is proposed to introduce mandatory courses. For already employed professors, the participation in the courses will be rewarded. Qualification opportunities will also be developed for other teaching staff. In the first three years the participation in qualification schemes will be mandatory for new teaching staff once a year (RWTHA, 2009). Similarly, university TUM proposes to widen the opportunities and develop existing courses.

University UB proposes two new qualification programs for PhD students and young researchers. One course should be for disciplines with empirical and experimental focus and the other for disciplines with a mathematical-statistical focus. The courses will take ten days plus a practical phase to test the knowledge (UB, 2009).

At TUK it is proposed to make the participation in qualification courses mandatory for new teaching staff, furthermore, the pilot faculties are committed to qualifying half of their current teaching staff (TUK, 2009).

UP proposes two different qualification programs, one for PhD students and one for post-docs and junior professors. For PhD students the opportunity to take part in a three-cycle qualification program should be offered. In the first phase participants should be taught in didactical topics, in the second phase teaching guided by a mentor will be included and in the third phase participants will undertake individual teaching. For post-docs and junior

professors qualifications related to competence-oriented teaching, planning and developing of study programs will be provided. Participation should be obligatory. Incentives for participation should be introduced to motivate staff to participate in the program (UP, 2009).

To summarize, also in the application a high variation of proposed strategies is recognized, first, in the sense that mostly a strategy is only proposed by one or two universities and second, while the operationalization of strategies is diverse. Besides the differences, similarities between the applications can be detected as well. First, the most strategies proposed by the universities are linked to the institutional level. Only in the application from ARWTHA and TUK disciplinary strategies are proposed. Furthermore all universities proposed strategies with are related to both approaches and mainly focus on staff developement and the improvement of teaching activities, whereas the latest is either done by cultural or by structural change.



## 6 Teaching Excellence in the 'Competition for Teaching Excellence'

As shown in the last chapter, in the analyzed documents various strategies are recommended and proposed. No clear preference for one of the approaches can be recognized; rather, a combination of the two seems to be favored. Instead of promoting one specific perception of teaching excellence, the competition supports a wide perspective of teaching excellence. This is done in two ways, first due to the various recommendations given and second due to the selection of applications with high variation. In the following, the findings presented in the last chapter will be discussed according to the research questions.

### **Question A: How is teaching excellence framed in the competition?**

As seen in the figures three and four, recommendations made to increase teaching quality are diverse. Furthermore, as already mentioned, the selection criteria also present a vague perception of teaching excellence. They are more concerned with structural criteria than a specific perception of teaching excellence. This indicates that the frame of the competition leaves much space for institutional variation and does not foster one specific perception of teaching excellence.

However, this does not mean that through the frame of the competition no perception of teaching excellence is described. Through the variation in the recommendations, which also include all levels in higher education, teaching excellence is presented as a multidimensional concept. *“Through joint efforts by teachers, students, administrators, leaders and the state it should be possible to use and develop the potential of the system and increase the quality of higher education in Germany.”* (WR, 2008, p. 55 Translated by the author) Even though in other initiatives teaching excellence is often understood as a private task of teachers (D'Andrea, 2007), here, to achieve teaching excellence, strategies at all levels and by all actors are seen as important, including the Länder level, at which the provision of sufficient resources is to be given priority.

Furthermore, in the frame of the competition no clear description of teaching excellence is provided. The reason for that may be connected to the lack of research, so that a clear definition of the concept does not exist. Furthermore, studies in higher education have shown

that path dependency in change processes is important for successful change (Krücken, 2003). Therefore, the vague formulation of the concept may have a positive influence on the implementation process at the institutional level. Through the vague formulation and the variety in recommendations, institutional histories and characteristics are not ignored; the institution can rather create their own specific strategy which reflects institutional history and conditions.

As seen above, no clear preference for one of the approaches towards teaching excellence was discernible in the frame. Nevertheless, the competition as such can be seen as a cultural approach towards teaching excellence. The competition clearly uses cultural components, since it rewards and values institutional commitment in teaching and learning with the provision of resources. Furthermore, through conferences organized during the competition and the work on the quality cycle it provided a platform for higher education institutions to talk about teaching and learning. Therefore, it can be argued that through the competition a culture of teaching is established outside of the institution which value and recognize teaching as an important task. This culture than may be transferred within the institution and lead to changes and improvements there.

### **Question B: How is teaching excellence operationalized in the applications?**

In the applications, a variety of strategies, as seen in tables number ten and eleven, are proposed by the universities. No university, as already mentioned, proposes the same set of strategies. The differences between the strategies proposed is twofold, first in the sense of different strategies proposed and second in the different realizations of the same strategies. Also, no clear preference for one approach is discernible; but all institutions rather used a mixed approach.

Besides the differences in strategies proposed in the applications as described in the previous chapter, a strong focus is set on the development of teaching activities and on qualification for teachers. Strategies developing teaching activities are mainly introduced indirectly through the provision of sabbaticals, this combines structural changes in learning activities with cultural changes because development activities are valued and rewarded through allocation of resources (money and or time). Only two universities (RWTHA, TUK) propose direct strategies in this field. Furthermore, since the development activities are mainly linked to the disciplinary level, different needs in the various disciplines are considered. According to

Fanghanel (2007), especially the disciplinary level is important for achieving teaching excellence. Since most strategies are related to the institutional level, creating strategies in which disciplinary differences are recognized might be important. In other strategies proposed by the universities, disciplinary differences are rarely displayed. Only the applications from university RWTHA and TUK propose direct strategies for developing teaching activities which focus on specific disciplines. Since the most strategies proposed by the universities are directed to the whole institution and not to specific disciplines or individuals the competition emphasize the responsibility of the organization for teaching excellence.

In comparison with other initiatives, scholarship of teaching as an indicator for teaching excellence is almost absent. Only the need for a nexus between research and teaching is mentioned in all documents which is mentioned to be one of the goal of quality teaching. Nevertheless, the strategies proposed are rarely linked directly to this goal.

As mentioned, the frame of the competition leaves much space for institutional design of the strategies, accordingly, similar strategies are also described differently in the applications. However, these differences can also be detected when the strategy is described in detail in the frame of the competition. This is visible in the strategy ‘qualifying teaching staff’. It is proposed to introduce mandatory courses, whereas others will give incentives to staff who volunteer to take part in qualification schemes. This reflects differences in how a new culture in teaching and learning will be implemented, either through a top-down approach or through the provision of incentives for activities related to teaching and learning. Additionally, the content of the courses are diverse and do not follow the description in the document from the WR.

As mentioned above, through the space that the frame of the competition leaves for the creation of institutional specific strategies, the implementation process can be affected positively. Also the variation in the selected applications may have a positive effect.

Since one of the purposes of the initiative is to increase the quality of teaching in the whole system and not just in the selected institution, rewarding diverse applications may increase the opportunity for other institutions to take one of the applications as a role model. A link to the diverse characteristics of the selected universities can be made here. If only one type of institutions had been selected, the possibilities of copying strategies from them would have been difficult for other types of institutions. The differences in institutional characteristics

therefore can be seen as a method to augment the effect that the competition can have on the whole system.

However, the diversity of conceptions can also lead to problems. What is valued in one institution may not be seen as excellent in another. Especially in the field of staff development this can cause problems and can deter universities from participating in the programs, since no common standards and recognition schemes are established. Nevertheless, through the production of the 'Charta of Good Teaching', which will be written by all winning institutions, a common perception may emerge.

The variance found in the applications can also be a result of the vague description of teaching excellence in the selection criteria. As mentioned in chapter five, the selection criteria focus on structural aspects and not on a specific view on teaching excellence. Therefore, the applications of the universities may also focus more on these aspects than on a specific perception of teaching excellence. Furthermore, since the competition was one of the first attempts to reward teaching excellence in this way, the selection of diverse applications may also indicate a test approach of the competition to find out what works and what does not work.

Finally, it may be that the differences between the institutions are not as fundamental as shown above, since only strategies proposed in the applications were examined. It is possible that strategies proposed by one university have already been implemented at another university and therefore have not been proposed.

### **How is teaching excellence perceived in the 'Competition for Teaching Excellence' in Germany?**

According to the results discussed above, the competition does not promote one specific perception of teaching excellence. As already discussed, this variety may have a positive influence on the implementation process and on the effect the competition may have on the whole system. But this can also lead to problems since no common perception exists of what excellence in teaching is, this can lead to the problem "*(...) that anything can be excellent ('excellence comes as standard' (...) which means that we fall into relativism and excellence fails to have any meaning at all (...).*" (Skelton, 2007a, p. 265) This effect may not play a strong role in this competition since what was rewarded in the competition was not a specific

performance, but rather the commitment of an institution to change and to developing teaching activities. This is indicated through the high variation in honored application and the different operationalization of the proposed strategies.

As already discussed above, it seems that no specific perception of teaching excellence is perceived in the competition. Nevertheless, according to the results, the combination of structural and cultural approach to change seems to be an obligation. The combination is detected, as discussed above, in the frame and in the application and is the binding element between the diverse applications. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’, excellence is perceived as an organizational approach in which structural and cultural strategies are combined.

The organizational approach can be described as an approach towards teaching excellence where the responsibility for quality in teaching is linked to the whole institution. Therefore, actions are needed by all actors and at all levels. Furthermore, the responsibility of the organization emphasizes the role of the central leadership to create conditions in which individuals can improve teaching and learning. These conditions are created through both structural and cultural changes. Whereas the combination of the two approaches is seen as an obligation the specific construction of strategies within the organizational approach are diverse and are fostered through the selection process.

Consequently, on the one hand, standards in the sense of an overall perception of teaching excellence are promoted by the competition, but on the other hand institutional differentiation is manifested through the variety of possible pathways.

Similarly to this an *institution-wide strategic approach* is mentioned in the academic literature. According to D’Andrea and Gosling (2005, p. 2), this approach is necessary to ensure better quality in teaching.

*We propose that a key condition necessary to meet the challenges of improving teaching and learning in higher education is an institution-wide strategic approach. This means that it is important to take account of the teacher’s behavior, their views of teaching, their understanding of student learning and so on, and also the wider cultural and institutional context within which these behaviors and beliefs are developed, maintained or even undermined. Improving teaching requires attention to the complete range of activities that make up higher education: it benefits from taking a holistic approach.*

## 7 Conclusion

The ‘Competition for Teaching Excellence’ promotes the perception of an organizational approach towards teaching excellence. In this approach, structural change and cultural change are combined and the organizational responsibility for quality teaching is seen as important. Whereas standardization is fostered by the necessity of the organizational approach, institutional diversity is ensured by the many possible paths towards this approach. This is especially discernible because of the high variation in strategies proposed by the honored applications.

This study shows that the purpose of the competition was not, as already mentioned above, to promote a specific operationalization of teaching and learning, rather it promotes the responsibility of the organization for the improvement of teaching and learning. This is especially reflected by the high variation of strategies in the honored applications. Furthermore, the competition stresses the importance of central leadership for improvements in teaching. Indications for the prominent role of the central leadership for improvement in teaching are as followed: firstly, the competition honored whole institutions and the central leadership was in the position to set up the application or at least sign it. Second, as already mentioned, the applications can be regarded as institutional strategies for teaching. These strategies are in the responsibility of the central leadership and for the implementation of most proposed strategies action on the central level is needed. The responsibility of central leadership can be described as the task to create good conditions for teaching within the organization. These conditions, according to the results of the study, have to be formed through the combination of structural and cultural change.

Therefore the competition clearly moves away from an individual perspective on teaching excellence where the performance of an individual teacher is in focus, rather it emphasizes the importance of the teaching and learning environment. Therefore the purpose of the competition appears to change the understanding of excellence in teaching. While often teaching excellence is seen as a private task, due to the competition, teaching excellence is in responsibility of the organization.

It is a question if the focus on the central leadership is an intended or unintended effect of the competition. Although when there are some features in the construction of the competition

which strengthen the role of the central leadership this may be unintended. It can be concluded that beside the stated purposes of the competition, other purposes are met as well as described above. If they were wanted or not cannot be answered in this study but nevertheless are of interest.

## **7.1 Further Research**

Since the research conducted in this study was based on a fixed point and did not include the implementation process, a change in the perception of teaching excellence may already be on the way, especially through the process of developing the 'Charta of Good Teaching'. In the course of the research process several new questions have arisen which will be presented in this section. There are several possibilities for examining this topic and also the 'Competition for Teaching Excellence' further. First, it would be interesting to include the universities of applied sciences to see if differences between the applications can be seen.

Furthermore, in the near future the 'Charta of Good Teaching' will be published. In this Charta all winning institutions will work together to create standards for good teaching. Since the applications were diverse, it would be interesting to examine how the diversity in paths towards the institutional approach is reflected in the Charta or if there will already be some process of standardization.

The 'Competition for Teaching Excellence' was run from 2009 to 2012 and subsequently other initiatives have emerged. Examining which approaches are taken by following initiatives would be interesting in order to identify development, changes and common features. Especially comparing the competition with the program 'Quality Pact Teaching' (Qualitätspakt Lehre) could be rewarding since all institutions which were successful in the 'Competition for Teaching Excellence' were also selected for the new program.

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